THE CABLE

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THE CABLE

A Novel

BY

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Dedicated
ex voto
to

THE LITTLE WHITE CHURCH
of
ST. MARY OF THE MOUNT

at
Mount Pocono

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THE CABLE

CHAPTER I

ENTER MISS CICELY ADAIR

A GROUP of small boys stood on the corner, looking anxiously down the shaded street. They ranged from eight to twelve years in age; from grimy hands to universal griminess in uncleanliness; from comfortable meagreness to ragged poverty in clothing, while in race they were polyglot, but they were identical in the impatience with which they scanned the sidewalk, vision-length, and found it empty though there were frequent passers-by.

"Gee! What's the matter wid her?"

"Say! She wouldn't go th' udder way?"

"Th' odder way nothin'! Don't she know we're waitin' ?"

The tallest, but also the raggedest, boy of the group made a fine gesture, drawing a nickel watch from somewhere between his bagging shirt and tight trousers. " 'Tain't so late," he said, displaying the watch's candid face. "Twenty to one by mine, an' I set her by the city hall when de ball dropped 't noon. She ain't so late."

"Whatjer bet she's got, sour balls 'r peanuts?" asked the smallest boy.

"Pennies, maybe!" hopefully suggested a young Israelite not without guile; he was saving up for an excursion.

"Git out! She don't hand 'em out less'n she didn't have time to buy nothin'," a boy scornfully rebuked him. "Didn' she tell us she hadn't no use fer money presen's less'n she was up against it fer time?"

"I bet she's got somepin!" declared a round little colored boy. "We'd ought t' be gittin' down town; mos' in gen'ly she's here by now, an' we's gotter git our af'ernoon 'ditions."

"Oh, chase yourself, Coony! 'Tain't near two. Dere she is!"

The last speaker ended in a triumphant yell, wildly pointing down the street as he jumped up and down, his bare feet thudding on the pavement; his comrades echoed the yell with Indian War Dance gestures.

The cause of this suspense and final excitement was a slender young figure, tall for a girl, but looking taller than its actual height because of its boyish lines, the straight short skirt and straight loose jacket which clad it.

The girl wore light-weight summer tweed, several colors blended in its weave to a tone of warm brownish drab. Her gloveless hands were thrust into the jacket's side pockets; she wore a sailor hat, pushed back somewhat from her brow, but even if it had been set on her head straight, it

would not have confined her masses of brilliant hair; they wreathed her face in lawless rings which had the effect of a halo worn in jest.

She walked with a free, careless grace, a stride that was businesslike, yet springing, as of one who enjoyed the business which claimed her. Her face, which was not pretty, yet was compounded of many irregular charms, enhanced by a perfectly regular beauty of skin, was bright with smiles as she espied the shabby, yelling band awaiting her; the smile displayed an unbroken row of strong white teeth between full red lips. She waved her hand at the lads with a gesture which was like their own as they waved back at her, a straight-out motion from the brim of her hat, then flung widely out to the right.

"Gosh, ain't her hair red!" cried one of the boys, struck by the glow of the rings under the sailor hat in the sunshine.

"Red nothin'! You shut up!"

"Sure it's red! What is it, then?" The question in derision, not for information.

"It's—it's hair." The defender was at a loss, not being accustomed to define.

"You bet! Red hair! Awful red hair!" The triumphant tone was for victory, not because there was any desire to disparage this newsboys' goddess.

"Red hair yourse'f! Your mother's red-headed!" This was a shot in the dark; acquaintance between these boys, being confined to the streets, did not embrace knowledge of family tints.

"Sh' ain't! Black!" The wiry little Italian

struck his opponent a hard blow on the mouth with the back of his hand, and, with a growl like two puppies, they clinched.

The approaching figure broke into a run and came down upon them, the hair under dispute glowing to the utmost justification of its accuser, but the girl did not come like an avenging angel; her smile had widened and her eyes laughed with her lips, though it was a strong grasp that seized a shoulder of each combatant and swung them apart.

"Here, you young heathens, what's the matter with you? Fend fighting!" she cried in a breezy, clear young voice. "Tony Caprioli, slow down! Mike McGinty, what's wrong with you? Breaking the law! Fend fighting, you know, you scalawags!"

"He said you'd got red hair. I said 'tain't," muttered Tony, not yet "slowed down."

"He hit me first. I didn't mean nawthin' but —it looked red." Mike delicately altered the statement that he was about to make, implying that the appearance of the hair was a thing of the past.

The girl threw back her head and the brilliant hair seemed to scintillate as she laughed a jolly laugh.

"Tony, your name means goat—Caprioli—and I'm afraid you're it! Shame, my dear, when you're doing your best to bleach my hair, but Mike scores! My hair *is* red, hot red, and what's more I'm not sorry it is! Shake, boys, and stop your scrapping! Red hair is what gives me pep, and pep is what makes me hustle around—when I'm late, too!—and buy toffy squares for the crowd!

So it's all right, friend Tony, though I'm much obliged to you for standing up for me! Catch, fellows! I bought a box, two boxes, three squares apiece, and good luck to you all! Hurry up! It's almost one o'clock, and I'll have to run the rest of the way, or the girl I relieve will fight *me!*"

The animosity in the air cleared up like magic under the spell of this girl's merry laughter of eyes and lips. She rapidly dealt out sticky squares of toffy to the crowd, and boyishly, though daintily, licked her finger tips when the last square had left them.

"Enough of that!" she cried. "Suck it; don't chew it! You'll get no more toffy till cool weather comes! I was a dunce to buy anything so messy. Balls, or peanuts, or anything neat for mine—and so for yours!—till September! So long, boys, dear; I've got to hustle. Hope you'll each sell more than any of the rest! Every last paper you take out. Good-bye!"

She waved her hand to the adoring group; each boy waved back again and shouted: "Good-bye!" in spite of the difficulty of enunciation caused by a large, soft toffy square in the roof of the mouth.

The girl hurried away, not running as she had threatened to do, but walking so fast that running would have been easier.

The group of boys melted around the corner, in the direction of the shortest way to the newspaper offices, and the funny little daily event was over for the time being. The red-haired girl had formed the acquaintance of this young mongrel

band, and it had been her kindly whim to make for them a daily small joy to anticipate. She varied her gifts, but she never failed them; that they adored her and exalted her into an incarnate proof that human trustworthiness and kindness was truth, not fiction, she was keen enough to see was the best result of her action.

No one but herself and the boys knew about "this freak philanthropy," as she called it to herself; it took but a few minutes of her time and not a great expenditure of money. "It was worth it," so she told herself, "to let her red hair light up the poor little snipes' noon hour."

The girl swung into a tall building at a tremendous pace, her hands out of her pockets now, her arms swinging to speed her action, not at all breathless, but softly whistling: "Silver Threads among the Gold," a little twist around the corners of her lips as she considered how distant that state of things was from her own radiant locks.

She burst out of the elevator and into the great room of the telephone exchange almost with one movement, covering the intervening space between one and the other door on a sort of slide.

"Well, Cis Adair! If I didn't begin to wonder if you'd get here!" cried a small, extremely-ornamented young person waspishly, as the boyish red-haired girl appeared, throwing off her hat and jacket and hanging them up rapidly, smiling her gay smile at the small person whom she succeeded.

"Sure—ly, Amelia! Don't I always get there, whether it's to work or to play? I'm only five

minutes late, anyway," cried the newcomer, harnessing her ears.

"Five minutes is five minutes when you've got to get home, eat and dress. I've got a date, I'd have you know, Miss Cicely!" retorted Amelia.

"Lucky you! Fruit market's always closed for me; can't even get a date, not ever!" sighed Cicely with a pensive droop of the head and an inimitable little wink at the girl on her farther side. "Sorry, Amelia! I'll come five minutes early tomorrow, so get another date ready. Might I hint that you'd get there sooner if you started, now I am here, than if you lingered to reproach me?"

The other girls laughed, and Amelia Day flounced away with a toss of her head. It was recognized in the office that there "was no sort of use in trying to get ahead of Cis Adair." Most of the girls liked her, a few of them were her devoted admirers, so it was only Amelia who ever really longed to damage her happy-go-lucky confidence in herself and in all her world.

"Funny little old Amelia!" Cis said after Amelia had gone. "Seems to disagree with herself so like fury, and not to be able to cut herself out of her diet."

"Oh, Cis!" murmured Nan Dowling, Cis's next neighbor, at whom she had winked. "You do say such ridiculous things, and such just-right ones! You ought to write. That's Amelia all over; she does disagree with herself—little sour ball!"

"Thought we agreed not to fuss about her," hinted Cis. "I don't have to, as long as my shift

follows hers; I don't have more than a ships-that-pass-in-the-night, *au revoir* intercourse with Miss Day."

"No, but I do! I have her from nine to one, except during lunch, right in your place! Why aren't you on all through my shift, you blessed old duck, Cis?" cried Nan.

"Never could answer whys, Nan; nothing harder," said Cis cheerfully. "Be glad you've got the chance to sun yourself in the light of my hair from one to six! And that we don't get a whole lot of calls on our wires, usually, till after three, so we can 'chin.' "

"Amelia is raving jealous of you, Cis, and you know why!" said Nan. "She'd have your scalp, if she could get it."

"If she could get it she'd be welcome to it," declared Cis imperturbably. "Anyone that lets a person get her hands on her scalp so she can lift it, deserves to be scalped; that's what I say! Amelia can't harm me as long as I do my work and tend strictly to my own affairs. If you mean that Amelia Day is still stewing because that puffy Harold Brown thought he'd enjoy thinking that he thought a lot of me—" Cis shrugged her shoulders to conclude her sentence. "Stuff!" she added.

Nan laughed, but she looked anxious. "All the same, Amelia would love to get you out, Cis," she said. "Of course you don't care a rap what Harold Brown does—"

"Care!" Cis interrupted her. "Ever see a chestnut worm?"

Both girls went off into a spasm of laughter, subdued, not to disturb their companions. Harold Brown was large, plump, puffy and abnormally white; nothing was needed to point Cis's rhetorical question.

"Oh, Cis!" sighed Nan, as she sighed many times a day, in fervent, admiring delight over Cicely's high spirits. "Such a Cis!"

Nan had a call just then, but when she had answered it and was free again, she turned to Cis.

"It's not only Harold Brown, Cis; you don't seem to care about any of them," she said.

"Meaning boys and men?" asked Cis. "Wrong you are, my Nanny: I love 'em all."

"Yes, like one of themselves!" retorted Nan. "But not the way they do you! You're like a jolly boy yourself, friendly as anything, but you don't—And there are lots of them crazy about you! You make them sort of crazy over you, Cis, with your come-on-stand-off way, and your sort of —heady charm, like champagne!"

"Oh, say!" protested Cis. "Much you know about champagne, kid dear! You got that out of a novel; own up! The price of it per bottle, and the Eighteenth sitting on the bottles, shows that's a pure flight of fancy! Stick to facts, Anna Dowling! Me heady! I should say not!"

With that Cicely had a call, followed by five other calls, which kept her busy plugging in and attending to the time for awhile. When this was over, a lull followed, and Cis turned again to Nan.

"That was a coincidence, a sort of coincidental

run," she said. "The first call was Parkway 58 —and we know what that is, don't we, Nanny?"

"Of course; Miss Lucas," said Nan promptly.

"Neither of us ever thinks of any other Lucas but Miss Jeanette Lucas; we always forget there are other Lucases, a father, a mother, a younger sister, and a few boys, too young to matter, scattering along," commented Cis. "But it was for Miss Lucas, and what is more, it was her betrothed calling her. I always know his voice. To be truthful, I don't half like it; it's sweet, cloying, yet it isn't sweet—sounds the way maple syrup tastes when it's just beginning to work. At our house maple syrup always seems to work before it gets eaten; I don't know how often Miss Spencer puts it on the table like that! It's an awful sell when you pour it over cakes! Well, about Mr. Herbert Dale's voice. I'm nuts on voices; I think they give their owners away more than anything else, and I don't like that voice over the 'phone. Hope I'm wrong, because Miss Jeanette Lucas is a fine girl. I met her once, though she wouldn't remember it, probably. She's a gentle, sweet, ladylike, old-fashioned sort of girl, and I imagine she's the kind that loves a man adoringly, when she gets about it."

"That's the way to love the man one marries," declared romantic Nan.

"No disputing the proposition, but it's dangerous, because most men are quite a good deal human," Cis observed dryly.

"You needn't talk! If you ever fall in love,

you'll pave the path of the man with your whole self!" cried Nan.

"Heavens! Not so loud, Nan! That's nothing to tell a crowd! Besides I would not!" whispered Cicely.

Then with a swift abandonment of her position, she said aloud, with a suppressed vehemence: "Well, what would be the fun of loving any other way?"

"Not much fun, either, when you take it like a fatal disease," said Nan. "Where was the coincidence in Mr. Dale's calling up Miss Lucas, Cis?"

"Nowhere. But the coincidence was that the rest of those calls I had were Miss Lucas calling up Oldboy's store, and a dressmaker, and a jeweller, and a garage," Cis explained.

"She would, she does every day. Of course she would, now that she is getting ready to be married as fast as she can," murmured Nan, disappointed that there was no more in Cicely's mystery.

"Yes, of course," agreed Cis. "I merely said that she called these people as soon as her betrothed rang off. Ever notice the way he calls? I'd not only know his voice over a wire in China, but he gives the number so peculiarly: 'I'd like to get 58, the Parkway, if you please.'" Cis imitated an oily, smooth voice, unctuously used, and Nan laughed.

"That's he!" she cried. "You're a mocking bird as well as a tanager, as you call yourself, Cis! The paper last Sunday had Miss Lucas' picture on the society page, with Mr. Herbert Dale's, and said

they'd be married on the 10th of next month, in our church, with a Nuptial Mass. Is Mr. Dale a Catholic, Cis?"

"Not enough to notice, I think," said Cis. "His people are. The Lucases are strict; I suspect that sweet Jeanette will make him toe the mark when it comes to the wedding. Probably she's got a candle burning all the time before the Lourdes shrine, and means to make him a saint at the end of six months. Wish she may! I'm sure I don't really know but he's going that way on his own, but I honestly hate his voice!"

"Aren't you queer, Cis? You don't often get down on anyone; you're pretty sure to give everyone the benefit of the doubt," cried Nan, wondering. Then she hesitated, and whispered: "Did you go to the seven o'clock yesterday, Cis, dear?"

Cis shook her head, her color mounting slightly.

"I didn't see you at the eight o'clock Mass, as usual," persisted Nan timidly, for Cicely looked forbidding.

"Good reason why," said Cis shortly. "I wasn't there. And I didn't go to Late Mass, so don't go on to that, Nan; I didn't go at all."

"Oh, Cicely dear!" Pain crept into Nan's words, though they were whispered.

"Well! Oh, Nan dear!" Cis tried to laugh at her. "Yes, I know I'm bad, but I *was* so tired! I was out till after one, danced, and ate such a supper! I did mean to go to the eight, but I turned over, stretched and—" Cis made a slight gesture

that conveyed the suggestion of a passage beyond daily affairs.

"Cis, oh, Cis! And you are so fine, so splendid! Why don't you make it perfect? You're a Catholic," sighed loving Nan, her gentle eyes clouded.

"I'm nothing else, at least, Nanny, but it doesn't bother me a great deal, all this that has to do with such far-off things! I'm sorry, nice little Nan! I will brace up, I promise you, and go to Mass Sundays. When I get there, it's hot and crowded, and I'm just there in my body, and not my mind, and it's a mighty uncomfortable body, I can tell you that! I wonder if it makes much difference whether you go or not, when you go like an oyster? Sorry, Nanny," Cis said again, seeing how grieved Nan looked. "I didn't have your training; maybe that's it. I went to public school and high school, and my mother died when I was eight, and my father was no good, and went off to his own ways when I was a baby, so I'm kind of a hybrid Catholic-heathen! Sorry, nice little Nan!"

"You're the biggest girl I know, the truest and finest, and I'm sure God will pull you to Him. You're too great to miss the Greatest," said Nan, with such earnestness in spite of her muffled voice, and with such a light in her eyes, that careless Cicely was impressed.

"Put your candle beside Miss Jeanette Lucas'," she said, knowing that the look in Nan's eyes foretold prayers for her beloved Cicely's safety.

"You two girls have talked enough in duet for one day," remonstrated another girl, a little distance down the table from Cis and Nan. "We like a whack at Cis ourselves, Nan Dowling!"

"Won't get much more chance to talk, duet or chorus," said Cis. "Half past two, and the afternoon buzz is beginning."

It was a particularly busy afternoon in this uptown exchange. Nan went off duty at five, but she waited that night to go out to supper with Cis, whose hours did not end till ten at night, and who supped in the restaurant on the top floor of the building, and returned to the exchange to finish her eight-hours' shift.

Cis did not know what fear was; she went about the quiet streets after ten o'clock at night, when she was returning to her boarding place, with the same careless assurance with which she walked the streets at ten o'clock in the morning. There was that about her carriage, her free, graceful walk, her faultless complexion, her glowing, abundant, striking hair that made her a conspicuous figure; yet there was also in her entire effect that indifference to notice, that light-hearted frankness, that absence of self-consciousness, which reveals the Una-like girl who walks the earth fearing no man because she seeks no man's admiration.

It is the glory of our American curious compound, that such a maidenly girl is rarely molested if she keeps within decent neighborhoods at not too-late hours, and Cicely Adair went and came as

safely as if she were a child playing in her father's garden.

"I hate to leave you, Cis, but nothing ever does happen to you," said Nan, after they had supped, and Cicely was preparing to return to the office and Nan to go home.

"You wouldn't be a mighty protection, small Nan," laughed Cis. "Nonsense, child! I'm off by ten, and that's only an hour after nine, and nine is curfew hour, so that's all right! I'll go back to the office and join up the rest of the world on wires, and go home as I always do. Don't you know, no one would dare molest a red-haired girl? I fly a danger signal on top, and they turn out for me!"

CHAPTER II

THE RÔLE OF PERSEUS

CIS resumed her place at the long table, and slipped what she called "her bridle" around her head with the cheerful philosophy customary to her at this end of her eight-hours' employment. She had somewhere in the back of her brain a suppressed consciousness that there were pleasanter ways for attractive and lively youth to spend an evening, but this was "her job." "My job" summed up in Cis's mind and on her tongue a whole unformulated, yet distinct code of duty. What was one's job must be done, that was clear enough, and done well, no shirking, still more, no neglect. If one took a job, fidelity was implied in its acceptance: "Take it or leave it, but if you take it, take it down to the ground," Cis would have put it. She despised a shirker and a slacker; she "played the game straight," whatever game she entered upon. "Her job" stood for the flag in a soldier's hand, the pledge of an obligation. "If you take a man's money deliver the goods," Cis told another girl who was not serving well her employer's interests. It was not a bad code to steer by, as far as it went; if it did not imply supernatural motives, it was a good foundation upon which to build them.

The girl who had taken Nan's place while Cis was out, was by no means Nan; she was an unattractive person to Cicely. Indeed, there was no other girl in the room for whom friendly Cis, who felt kindly disposed to them all, ready to oblige and amuse them, cared in the least. Cicely, who had been graduated from high school, and Nan, the devout little product of the parochial school, were better educated than any of their companions. Neither Cis nor Nan had time, nor desire for much reading; they were far from being cultivated girls, but they were well taught, and they found little to attract them in the foolish interests, badly expressed, the tiresome conversation of their working mates.

So when Cis resumed her place, she nodded in return to the nod from the bobbed hair now beside her; said a few words which set the girl to whom they were spoken, off into a giggle, and turned her attention to her switchboard, as a hint that business only was her end in view.

In this uptown exchange early evening calls were many; there would not have been the opportunity for talk, had Cis desired it, which she and Nan usually found in the afternoon. Cis plugged-in rapidly; answered questions—rather more than was her office—corrected errors, untangled the difficulties of the old gentleman who turned in many calls every night and regularly called wrong numbers, till nine o'clock was recorded on the wall clock regulated by telegraph from Washington, and Cicely Adair drew a long breath.

"One more hour!" she said aloud. "Went fast to-night!"

"Someone meetin' you, Cis?" asked her neighbor.

Cicely shook her head. "I'm the cat that walks by herself," she said lightly. "Not a man will bother with me—but, as to that, none will bother me going home, so it works good and bad!"

"Yes, I guess so!" her neighbor derisively replied. "Pity 'bout you! Us girls are on to you, Miss Adair! The fellers'd tumble for you if you didn't jack 'em up!"

"Fiddlesticks! But I won't have anyone calling for me; puts you under obligations," said Cis impatiently.

"You said a mouthful!" the girl endorsed her, then added significantly: "I got one comin' after me, but I don't get off till one, Q. T. Dang'rous goin' alone at that littlest hour!"

The girl laughed and Cis looked disgusted, drawing away with a slight, involuntary movement before she recalled herself. Then she said:

"One is a lot later than ten, more than the four hours later. Glad you've someone to see you safe, Mimi."

Cicely turned back to her switchboard, refusing to share the humor of Mimi's being escorted home, and as she did so she received a call.

"I'd like to get 12, the Boulevard, if you please," a voice said.

Cicely said sharply: "*What* number did you say?"

She recognized the voice and the peculiar form

of its call. It was the oily, yet sub-acid voice which Cis had said was like maple syrup beginning to ferment, the voice which she distrusted, the voice of sweet Jeanette Lucas' betrothed, to whom her marriage was imminent.

"What number did you say?" Cicely therefore said sharply; could he have possibly mistaken his call? Parkway 58 was the Lucas call, and this, Boulevard 12—Why, in the name of all that was good and loyal was this Herbert Dale calling Boulevard 12?

"I'd like to get 12, the Boulevard," repeated the suave voice, this time with its sub-acid quality less submerged.

Cicely plugged-in for the required number, but her wits were working quickly, her warm heart was beating fast, sending the blood up to her bright hair with a generous, pitying indignation for the girl whom she admired at a distance, whom she had set up in a sort of shrine as the ideal maiden.

Cicely was not in the habit of indulging curiosity by "listening in"; indeed, she felt little curiosity as to other people's affairs, but now what she felt was not curiosity, but a burning sympathy for that other girl. Therefore she listened in. Only a few moments did she listen to the conversation between Herbert Dale, on one end of the wire, and someone at Boulevard 12 on the other. She heard enough to satisfy her that her favorite theory of voices being indicative had a solid foundation in fact. She jerked herself away from her eavesdropping, let her hands fall into her lap, nervously

twisting her fingers, her head bowed as she rapidly examined herself as to what she meant to do about it.

"For the love of Pete, Cis Adair, your face's redder'n your hair; you're *all* red! You listened in! What's up?" cried her neighbor, putting out her hand to follow Cicely's example.

"Keep off! It's my business!" ordered Cicely sharply, and the girl thought it better to abandon her plan, warned by the flash in Cis's eyes.

"Just hold your tongue, Mimi, a bit; I've got to think," Cis added, and again Mimi obeyed her.

"She won't thank me," Cis told herself. "Not now, anyway; may later. But it's not a square deal to keep her in the dark. If she chooses to go on with him, it's her business, but she ought to have the chance to choose; that's it! She's no sort of idea. She's a little idiot if she marries him, knowing he can't be trusted when such a girl's that has set the 10th for the wedding. But that's her affair. I'll not deal straight with her if I don't let her in on what I know. It'll hit her hard, poor kid, but it might be worse, only she won't see that now. It will cost me my job. Mimi's sure to tell Amelia; she's thick with her. I'll be giving her my scalp, sure and certain. Well, what of it? What's my job, beside the whole life of a mighty fine girl? Mimi may hold her tongue—No, she won't! Well, if it makes me pay, what's that to do with the rights of it? I'd take it pretty cruel if another girl didn't stand by me in Miss Lucas' place. I'm going to do it!"

Cicely set her plug in Parkway 58; her hand trembled as she did so, Mimi, watching intently, saw it shake. She was suspicious. To let anyone in on a wire to listen to a conversation was to break one of the fundamental laws of the company.

Mimi suspected that Cicely Adair was breaking that law now.

"Is this Miss Lucas? Miss Jeanette Lucas?" Cis asked. "Please hold your receiver. I'm connecting you on a wire. It's something you must hear. Go ahead."

Then Cis dropped her face into her hands and sat quite still, as if she were waiting for the stroke of fate. No stroke fell, however; the call for Boulevard 12 was rung off; Cis noted the excess rate, which was considerable, and notified the public station whence the call had come, of the amount due. She half expected to be called by Jeanette Lucas, impersonally, as "Central," but no such call came, and when the office clock pointed to ten, Cicely arose, doffed her "bridle," and turned to Mimi.

"See here, Mimi," she said, "I never did think there was much use in asking a girl for a solemn promise to keep a secret. If you tell her you don't want something told she won't tell it, if she's white; if she's any other color all the promises this side of Jericho won't stop her talking. Now, of course you know I did something to-night that's dead against the rules, but I tell you that it was the only decent thing to do, and whatever happened I knew I had to do it, and I'd do it again this minute,

because it *was* right. I've had time to think it over, and I'm surer every instant that I did the square thing. That's all I can tell you, or anyone, because the rest is none of our business. I don't want you to tell a living soul what you saw and heard; I ask you not to. And that's all I can do about it. If you keep your tongue between your teeth I'll not forget it of you, and I'll do you a good turn the first chance I get. Signed: Cicely Adair."

Mimi laughed. "Sent special? All right; I got it. Say, Cis, Amelia 'n me 's pals, but I'm not with her 'bout you. She's jealous, that's what's eatin' 'Melia. I ain't; I don't haf to be! I won't tell. It's a rich one, but I won't tell; honest, cross m' heart! The comp'ny wouldn't do a thing to you if they heard it, I'll tell the world! Don't you worry, Cis; I like you; you're a great one. I'll never give you away, don't you fret! Gee! What d'you s'pose 'Melia'd do to you if she had you down like this! She says you think you're the cat's miauw. She'd give you a miauw, I'll say she would!"

"Thanks, Mimi. It's straight of you to keep this to yourself. Good night," said Cis, and went away. "Little snipe! Sure she'll tell Amelia!" she thought as she walked rapidly down the quiet street.

The next day passed without anything unusual to mark it, to Cicely's surprise. She felt that anything and everything were imminent, but nothing more exciting befell her than being one bag of

peanuts short in her noon distribution to her gamin friends, owing to the unforeseen appearance of Tony Caprioli's little brother, who had to be compensated with a nickel. It was a perfectly satisfactory substitute, Cis found to her relief, mainly because Tony divided his peanuts with the young Luigi, who thus came out well ahead of the game.

The second day, however, Cicely's bright head fell under the guillotine, a martyr to a certain kind of nobility which makes the figure of the guillotine not unsuitable.

When Cis came into the office, nearly ten minutes ahead of her schedule, there fell upon all the girls that significant hush which eloquently declares by its silence that the newcomer has been the subject of conversation up to the moment when the door swung. Amelia's face was red beyond and additionally to the paint which frankly adorned her cheeks and lips; she looked malevolent and triumphant. Nan was flushed, almost purpling; her eyes were nervously excited and tearful. All the other girls looked uncomfortable, and most of them looked regretful, Cis was glad to see, for she instantly knew what had happened.

"I'm workin' double shift, Cis; no need you settin' down. I'm doin' your shift till the next orders. You're to go to th' office soon's you show up," said Amelia gloatingly.

"Well, they were slow about it!" exclaimed Cis swinging around. "I thought I'd hear this yesterday."

"Oh, Cis, Cis, dear!" moaned Nan.

"Nobody's to blame but yourself, Cis Adair! Mimi didn't want to tell on you, but when she tol' me, I said she'd ought to come out with it, not let nice girls that kep' the rules get looked at crooked for what *they* wouldn't do, not for nothin'. What I say is, it's easy rule to keep; simply tend to your own bus'nuss. Listenin' in ain't what int'rusts *me;* it don't girls that's got gentlemen friends an' ev'rything. I'll do your work to-day, Cis Adair, but the comp'ny won't let *me* overdo long, I'll tell the world! You're wanted in the office, Cis Adair, an' it's a cinch you're not wanted elsewheres!" Amelia delivered her speech explosively.

Cis laughed lightly as she went toward the door.

"Do you honestly think that I didn't know precisely what would happen when I—when I—danced, would you call it? I knew what the fiddler would cost," she said. "Don't weep for me, Amelia! Nancy, stay down and have supper with me, will you? I'll be waiting for you in the drug store."

Nan nodded, speechless, and Cis went off, without outward sign of perturbation, to meet the manager of this office, who had always been her friend, as he had proved in many trifling ways.

"Ah, Miss Adair, I'm sorry to have to see you to-day, and for the reason which made me summon you. Please be seated," he said. "I think you must know that reason?"

"Not much use in play-acting, Mr. Singer, so

I'm not going to pretend I don't! Yes, I know," said Cis.

"One of our subscribers reported to us yesterday that a girl in our exchange had connected another of our subscribers with a conversation which he was holding. This action has, justly, too, infuriated the gentleman whose conversation was thus overheard. He has demanded that we find and properly punish the offending operator. Her action has led to the most disastrous consequences, in fact to great loss and grief to the gentleman—"

"No! Has it, though?" cried Cis almost springing to her feet. "Then she was game; she did have sense enough to throw him down!"

"Evidently, Miss Adair, your action was intended to work harm to the gentleman. Do you know him personally, or the subscriber whom you connected with his wire?"

Mr. Singer, Cis felt sure, was controlling a desire to laugh.

"No, indeed, but when a nice girl is getting fooled—"

"Now, Miss Adair, that will do. Let us avoid open allusions. Knowing you, I am inclined to think that you acted from a sort of mistaken chivalry; that you yielded to an impulse to save another girl from what you feared would be greater sorrow than you were inflicting upon her. You see, I give you full credit for good, even for rather fine motives, and I acknowledge that it is refreshing to find a girl with ideals such as this reveals.

But it won't do, Miss Adair, it won't do! The telephone company is not in business to guard morals, nor its subscribers' welfare; it is in business to transmit messages and to see that their privacy is secured to their subscribers. You have broken one of the fundamental, inviolable rules of your office, and there is nothing for me to do but dismiss you." Mr. Singer ended with regret in his voice.

"Sure, Mr. Singer!" Cis agreed. "I knew it would come out, and I'd be thrown down. Sorry, but I'd do it right over again this minute."

"I quite believe that!" Mr. Singer allowed himself a sound of laughter in his throat that did not pass his lips. "You have been a good operator, Miss Adair; quick, yet patient; faithful, punctual, and—until now—highly honorable. I'm exceedingly sorry to lose you, sorrier to dismiss you. I wish that you had not felt it necessary to load your gun and take a shot at birds, which were, after all, not in your field."

"If you had a daughter, or a sister, a nice, a lovely girl, all innocent and—and well, *white*, Mr. Singer, wouldn't you give her a chance to keep out of a regular sell, wouldn't you put her wise and let her have her chance, at least? I bet you would, and I did!" cried Cicely.

Mr. Singer arose, holding out his hand in farewell, not otherwise replying to Cicely's question.

"Good-bye, Miss Adair, and good luck. If I can be of use to you, let me know. But in your next position keep to your rules, and don't let your im-

agination lead you into quixotic scrapes," he said. "The cashier will give you your check. I'll gladly recommend you to anyone whom you may send to me, but I cannot condone your disobedience here."

"Of course not!" Cis heartily agreed. "Thanks, Mr. Singer. I knew I'd lose my head, so don't feel sorry about it. You know red heads get through worse thickets than this one. You've been downright dandy to me; much obliged, honest! Good-bye; sorry to say it to you, but I'm glad about the rest of it."

"We had a little difficulty in identifying the offender, but at last we did so, through one of the girls whose friend had been a witness to your imprudence," said Mr. Singer, politely holding the door open for his unrepentant employee to leave him.

"There weren't many between whom to choose; all you had to do was to ask me; I'm on till ten on that section. I'd have told you I did it, if you'd asked me," said Cis, halting in the doorway.

"You certainly would have, Cicely the Sincere!" cried Mr. Singer, and this time he laughed aloud.

Nan hurried from the exchange at five o'clock sharp, and around to the drug store where Cicely was awaiting her.

"We don't eat to-night in the Tel. Restaurant, Nancy Bell; we eat at Hildreth's, one of his regular old ripping platter suppers: lobster; little necks sitting around him; broiled finan haddy, relishes —who minds being a Catholic on Friday when she's got the price of Hildreth's about her?" cried

Cis, seizing Nan's hand and tucking it into her arm. "Drew my last check from the Tel. Co., so it's on me, and a treat at Hildreth's, just to celebrate!"

"Oh, Cis, Cis, what are you going to do next?" sighed Nan, yielding, yet disapproving this extravagance.

"After the supper? I hadn't thought. Movie? But we don't care for movies!" Cis pretended to meditate.

"You know I don't mean that! What sort of work will you try for? Where will you go—"

Cis interrupted her by whistling blithely, as well as any boy could whistle, as indifferent as a boy to passers-by: "Oh, boys, where do we go from here?"

"Wait till after lobster, Nan, and I'll tell you," Cis then said, seeing Nan's real distress.

"Oh, that means something that would spoil my appetite!" cried prophetic Nan.

After a delicious supper in the famous sea-food specialty restaurant, to which Cis did fuller justice than Nan, Cis lay back in her chair, her small cup of black coffee before her, her eyes on the contorted shoulders of the 'cellist of the orchestra of four pieces which "helped float the fish," Cis said.

"Going to tell me?" hinted Nan.

"I hate to, Nan, because I know you'll hate it, and so do I, when I think of you. But I'm going to get out of here, altogether; I'm going to Beaconhite to try my luck," announced Cicely.

"Beaconhite! Whatever *for?*" gasped Nan.

"Never could tell you," said Cis airily. "Always wanted to try that little city. Spells its name so crazy, that's one reason; must have been Beacon Height once, of course. I always had an idea I'd like it; it's hustling, yet settled. I've some money saved up; not much; enough to carry me on till I get to earning, and I'm dead sick, dead tired of here! Not tired of you, little Nan, but of the place. I think I'd better move up a square or two; 'tisn't good to cork up too much fermentation. Honest, Nan, it's lucky I've not taken up that vitamine bug they're all rushing so! If I ate yeast cakes, like the rest of 'em, I'd fly to pieces! I'm going to Beaconhite and show it what a red-haired girl can do to it! Nanny, don't look so sorry! And don't cry, dear! That lobster shell had enough salt water, and too much hot water!"

"You'll forget all about me, and I love you dearly, Cis," faltered Nan.

"I'm just as fond of you as you are of me, nice little Silly!" cried Cis. "Only I'm not keen on mushiness. You've got to allow me one virtue: I stick when once I'm stuck; no waving around to this solid body! We'll be just as good friends, and we'll get together again, here or there, but it's the truth, Nan; I've got to break off, and break out new, or my red hair'll blaze up like a fire balloon, and there'll be no more of Miss Adair! I hated to tell you, but I'm glad it's done! If this hadn't happened in the office I'd have left next October; now it has happened, I'm going right off—or sooner."

"Right off? How soon, Cis?" faltered Nan.

"This is Friday; don't you think Monday is a good day to start a new record? First day of the week, first *week* day of the week, and washing day?" Cis suggested.

"I don't suppose any other day would be easier," admitted Nan. "Will you stay with me Sunday night, start from my house? Oh, Cis, Cis! There are only two days before Monday, and I never dreamed, never once *dreamed* this morning that I'd ever lose you!"

"I'm not dreaming it now, Nanny dear. We're friends for keeps. You can't lose me; I'm not that sort. Come along, Nan. I'm fed up on lobster, and I'm much more fed up on those fiddlers three —like Old King Cole's. But I seem to miss a jolly old soul in this crowd of two!"

Cis jumped up, paid the reckoning, and tucked Nan under her arm after her usual custom, her height and Nan's being adapted to this arrangement.

Thus they left the restaurant, Cis humming an old song which she had picked up from one of her elders: "You can't lose me, mah Honey," as appropriate to her assurance, to Nan, and as if she had not a care in the world.

CHAPTER III

MISS JEANETTE LUCAS

CIS spent Saturday forenoon picking up her belongings, packing certain things in a large old trunk, others of more immediate emphasis in a perfectly new, smaller trunk, leaving pictures and the few pieces of bric-a-brac which she owned, to be boxed.

She was entirely cheerful over these preparations, whistling softly between closed teeth, sometimes breaking into a snatch of song; it was evident that change was by no means unwelcome to her.

Nan Dowling, on the contrary, sat on the edge of the bed, avoiding physical comfort as her body dropped from extreme mental discomfort, watching Cis with her hands clasped, hanging forward between her knees; her lips drawn down, her eyes gloomy. She had the forenoon free because she was going on duty at one, Cis's old time, having made an exchange with another girl who gladly accepted the chance to have an evening off, especially Saturday evening.

"Cis, don't take everything you own with you!" remonstrated Nan. "Pack a trunk to leave at my house."

"I wonder why?" said Cis absent-mindedly. "Believe I'll give this blouse to the waitress. It's

a bit tight for me, though it's still as good as ever, but that poor little lean thing will like something decent, and she'll be able to lap it over the way it was meant to go; I can't."

She held up a pretty linen shirt-waist, turning it by the shoulders, considering it in the sunshine's strong light.

"You wonder why you should leave a trunk with me?" Nan persisted, ignoring Cis's suggestion of the gift. "Because it looks so horridly final when you've taken everything with you; you may want to come home again. At least you might let me hope that you will, let me feel I had a link with you."

"I won't come back next winter, Nanny; I'll push on farther if Beaconhite doesn't appreciate me—or I appreciate it. I don't say I'll never come back, but I know I'm going to keep away a while," declared Cis. "So there's no telling what I could get on without. And as to that word 'home' you used, where's my home? In those trunks! A girl like me, without kith nor kin, boarding or lodging, hasn't a home. Of course, I'll always call this old town home, because I was born here and grew up here, but that's nonsense, when you come to think of it. You're the only thing here to come back to; I don't need to leave a trunk to hitch me up to you, small Person! So your silly Cicely takes all she owns with her. Say, Nan, why do you suppose they didn't nickname me Silly, instead of Cis? Comes just as straight from Cicely!"

"Oh, dear Cis! You always make me feel as if

you were a kite and the rope was slipping through my fingers! You're the friendliest thing, yet you don't care one bit for people—unless it is for me?" sighed Nan. "Aren't you going to say good-bye to Father Lennon? And—and—go to confession this afternoon before you start?"

Cis shook her head hard. "Not time for confession for me yet; not for quite a long while. I'll turn up somewhere by Easter, maybe at Christmas! Don't look bothered, good little Nan! I'm going to be honest whatever else I am. I often wonder if I'm honest to go at all. You don't think God can like us to pretend, do you?" Cis turned unexpectedly serious.

"I think He likes us to hold on hard when we are tempted to let go, and that we can be honest in wanting to hold on, at least," said Nan slowly. "I'm pretty sure this idea you have of being honest is dangerous. Isn't it just as honest to receive the sacraments because you know you ought to, as because you happen to feel like it? And there's more merit in it, so it is sure to earn the feeling for you after a while?"

Nan spoke hesitatingly; she stood in awe of Cis, of her cleverness, her reserves, and also her unreserve, which was likely at any time to shock Nan.

"Maybe, nice Nanny," Cis assented lightly. "I'm so full of pep that I don't crave anything that life can't give, and I don't think I'm a great sinner, honest! I'm pretty square; I tell the truth; I hate lowness; I don't harm people, I even like to oil other people's springs when the going's hard. I

don't know exactly what religion does mean to me; I've got some, at least I'd never be anything but Catholic, but I can't see why I'm not living a decent life, better than some people's who are at confession every couple of weeks or so."

"Of course, Cis, and you're a peach; you know what I think of you, part of it, anyway. But that's not all of it. I'm no good at explaining, but all that's just this world," Nan faltered; she could have made her meaning clearer, but she shrank from preaching to Cis.

"This world it is, Nancy Bell! Where else is our address? I've heard about it; you mean what they say in church about 'natural virtues.' Well, I'd like to know who created nature, what's wrong with natural virtue? It's a nice, natural thing to be jolly, and kindly, and not jealous, or hen-minded—hen-minded and snake-acting! And you've got to own up that some pious people are just as jealous and harsh as can be, wouldn't deal half as decently with other folks as Cis, the Sinner! So that same Cis can't feel she's so awfully a sinner! As to saying good-bye to Father Lennon, why on earth should I bother him and myself, now I'm going away, when I never saw him to talk to him when I was here?" Cis flicked a scarf into Nan's face, adding:

"Smile awhile, Nancy! I may be headed wrong, but I'm not dying, and perhaps I'll brace up and turn saintly before Father Lennon—or someone else—comes to say good-bye to me for good and all!"

"You're so big and brave and daring; you're like a soldier! I can't bear to have you miss connections, Cis." Nan said softly. "Not enlist."

"Nice Nanny!" Cis began again, then held up her hand.

"Footsteps on the stairs, strange ones! Nan, they're coming this way! Think the company is sorry, and is sending me an appointment in the main office?"

Cis opened her door to a boy who knocked, a messenger boy.

"Miss Cicely Adair," said the boy, glancing from one to the other girl. "Answer. I wait—R. S. V. P., see?"

"I see!" cried Cis, smiling at the boy in perfect sympathy with his boyhood.

"I'm the lady you seek! Sit down—but for goodness' sake don't sit on my best hat! I'll read, then I'll write—maybe!"

She tore open the envelope addressed to her in an unknown, feminine hand, an unusual hand, full of character and refinement; she drew forth its contents.

"Well, Nan!" exclaimed Cis. "It's from Miss Lucas! Here, read it!"

Then she threw on the floor a pile of articles which covered a straight chair's seat, shoved back other things from the table end, and wrote:

DEAR MISS LUCAS:—I'll be at your house between three and four, as you ask.

Yours sincerely,

CICELY ADAIR.

She addressed an envelope, folded her tiny note, sealed it in the envelope, and handed it to the boy, who rose to go.

"You're one!" he said admiringly. "That's the kind o' letter! Don't have to hurt your eyes over it! Mostly they writes tons. Had the deuce of a time findin' you!"

"Don't blame you one bit!" said Cis cordially. "I have an awful time finding myself! But I think it pays in the end."

"Yeh," the boy grinned, instantly, like all boys, in perfect sympathy and understanding with Cis. "So long. Much obliged, but it's paid, both ways."

"Of course it is, but an ice cream cone does no harm, and that's outside your day's wages," retorted Cis, letting him out. Then she turned to Nan.

"What do you suppose she wants of me? Is it to bless, or to curse me? I've got to go, couldn't refuse and wouldn't want to, but at the same time if you want to play my part I'll lend you my clothes, Nan," she said.

Nan laughed; she would have tripped on Cis's skirt, short though skirts were, and fallen through her jacket.

"Your clothes are not a good fit for me, Cis, and I'd be less of a fit in your place at Miss Lucas'. I'll never be able to wait to hear what happens there!" said Nan.

"Pity you're on duty all this afternoon and evening! But I'm going to Mass to-morrow, sure. If

you go to the eight I'll meet you and tell you all I know," Cis suggested.

"All right; that's fine!" Nan's face brightened. "It's time I went home to lunch, if I'm to be at the office by one. Remember, you're to spend tomorrow night with me. Oh, Cis! Your last night!"

"Oh, I don't know! I look forward to many more nights, Nanny, and some of them with you!" laughed Cis, persistently cheerful.

Cis dressed for her call on Miss Jeanette Lucas with more trepidation than she would have been willing to acknowledge. She looked exceedingly well in setting forth, all in white; plain-tailored linen skirt; fine hand-wrought shirt-waist; a simple white hat of soft straw, with a soft white bow on one side its sole trimming; her masses of glowing, shining red hair emphasized by its snowy setting.

Cis noted her effects in the mirror with approval.

"Not so bad, Cicely, my dear," she said aloud. "Neat, but not gaudy—except your hair! You're not in the least a beauty, but you look kept-together, and I'm not ashamed to walk out with you, Miss Adair!"

She nodded at her reflection in the glass, sighed as she took up gloves, which she detested, and ran downstairs, dreading her coming call, yet afraid of being unpunctual.

The Lucas house stood back from the street behind its tall trees, screened from its surroundings, although its neighborhood was the best in town.

"The old Lucas place" was a landmark, built shortly after the building of the Republic; it had been finished in time to entertain Lafayette when he had returned to see the new order which his youthful love of adventure had helped to establish on the western continent. It had been deemed a pity that the old estate was exposed to the danger of ultimate transformation into a Roman Catholic institution by the conversion of its present owner to the Faith of France, a Faith which might do very well for French heroes, born to it, but did not do at all for unheroic Americans.

It was an unwarranted anxiety that apprehended such a transformation for the stately house; besides Jeanette, his oldest daughter, Robert Lucas had an older married son, three younger boys and two younger girls, so that heirs were not wanting to save the house from a Sisterhood, nor was its neighborhood falling off to bring about a desire on the part of the Lucas family to sell it.

Cis went up its broad front walk to its wide, simply beautiful front door, impressed and quieted by the repose, the certainty of fundamental things, which reached her even on the exterior of the house.

A soft-footed, soft-voiced maid, with perfect manners, responded to Cicely's summons. She said: "Please come in, Miss Adair. If you don't mind, will you go right up to Miss Jeanette's room? She is expecting you, and gave those orders. I will show you the way."

She led Cis up a long flight of stairs—the house

was remarkably high-ceiled—its steps low, mounting at the easiest possible angle, yet with a broad mahogany handrail to aid in progress. There was a deep recessed landing more than half-way up, an arched window lighting it, a splendid old clock standing back against the wall in its corner.

The maid knocked on a door that stood slightly ajar at the rear of the hall on the second floor, and instantly pushed it open.

"Miss Adair, Miss Jeanette. I brought her right up to you as you told me to," she said.

The maid stepped back and withdrew down the hall. A girl about Cicely's age arose from a low couch on which she had been reclining, and said, speaking low, lifelessly, as if speaking were an effort:

"Please come in, Miss Adair. You were kind to come. Will you take this chair?"

She drew forward slightly a deep chair, softly cushioned in dark blue, and herself dropped back on the couch, sidewise among its piled pillows, not lying down, but resting on her elbow. Yet, listless though her attitude was, her left hand clutched the corner of a pillow, wrinkling it tautly in a nervous grasp.

She was dark-eyed, dark-haired; Cis thought that she had never seen anyone so pale; her olive skin, naturally beautiful in tint and texture, was almost greenish in its livid tint; there were great circles under her eyes which looked sunken, as if they had been staring wide open into the dark for sleepless nights. Cis forgot her embarrassment, her uneasi-

ness as to what might be before her because of her share in what had befallen this girl, in an overwhelming pity for the grief which had thus wrecked her loveliness.

Miss Lucas suddenly spoke, clasping and twisting her fingers, her hands thrust forward on her knees, her eyes burning as they stared at Cis.

"I've seen you before," she said.

"I was introduced to you at a benefit for the Orphans; I served cream. I didn't expect you to remember me," Cis answered.

"You have a face to be remembered," Jeanette Lucas said. "We had hard work tracing you. We —I, rather—wanted to find the girl who——" she broke off; her low, husky notes gave way to a strident tone in her voice. She waved her hands as if she were throwing something away. "See here, Miss Adair, we've got to talk frankly, as one girl to another. There has been too much between us to beat about the bush, to try for foolish, futile disguises of speech."

"I never like them," said Cis.

"Then—why did you do what you did? Do you know—have you ever known—Herbert Dale?" demanded Jeanette, speaking with such eagerness that she could hardly enunciate.

"Never. I've seen him," replied Cis.

"But you knew that night who he was; you knew it was something concerning me nearly, horribly, tragically nearly. How?"

"He called you often; we get used to voices and ways on the wire, Miss Lucas. All the world knew

from the papers that you were to be married; that's easy to explain," Cis answered gently.

"What was your motive? Why did you connect me with that wire? Did you hate him, or me?" asked Jeanette.

"Oh, Miss Lucas, why do you say that? Can't you see why I did it?" cried Cis distressed. "I'd been admiring you; you're so pretty, so fine, so good, so stainless! It made me sick to think that you might be walking into unhappiness, blind, tricked. I did what I'd want done for me in your place; I put you where you could know, and then whatever you did, you'd do with your eyes open. I wanted you to have a square deal, dear Miss Lucas."

"At first I loathed you, I would have punished you," cried Jeanette. "But even at first I knew that I could not marry him. I tried to think I could, that I'd be a St. Monica, but no, oh, no! I could not see him; I could not think of him; he was a painted mummy case that held another body, not the body in which my heart was buried. It was not hatred, it was worse—distrust, horror! He was not only wicked, but he was deceiving. Oh, Cicely Adair, when you put me on that wire you killed innocent, poor young Jeanette Lucas! I don't know what it has done to me; I shall go on, but never again the girl who answered your call that awful night. We don't lightly break a promise to marry, we Catholics, but Father Lennon said that I could not marry a man from whom I shrank with horror. I am not going to marry. But I'm not

blaming you. I have been blessing you through long, black hours of day and night, all alike dark! I should have died if I had discovered that my husband was a liar, wicked. I thought that I should cure his one defect, his indifference to religion. I know now that he was false to all things, to me as well as to God! Cicely Adair, you're a Catholic girl; remember this lesson when you think of marrying. I am grateful to you, but, oh, I loved him, I loved him, and he never lived! I can't mourn the loss of the man I loved; there was no such man. You can put flowers on a grave. I myself am the only grave I have: I am dead, but the man I loved never lived. Oh, me, oh, me!"

"Dear, dear Miss Lucas! Oh, I'm sorry!" cried Cis, beginning to tremble.

"No! Be glad! I'm glad; indeed I am glad and grateful that you saved me from worse! My father never trusted Herbert Dale. Mother liked him, but father was afraid. He blesses you for what you did. It was fine for one girl to stand by another, unknown girl like that! I sent for you to tell you this. I hear the company found out, and dismissed you. There was a fearful scene when I gave back my ring and told Herbert that I knew him at last. He guessed—not at first, but after a while; I'm too dull to keep a secret against his experienced questioning—he guessed how I found out. He swore he'd have the girl dismissed who had put me on his wire. I know that he succeeded. I am profoundly sorry. I owe you what cannot be repaid, but—will you let my father help you in some way? He told

me to say to you, when I told him that I meant to find you and thank you, that you would be still more generous and unselfish than you've already been, if you would let him help you to your feet again. He said he would be honored in recommending you to any position, a girl with such fine kindness and loyalty and true standards as yours are! Will you be frank with me, please, dear? I've spoken to you without the thinnest veil over my face!"

"Bless your dear, sweet soul!" cried Cis. "I'm all right. I'm leaving town to-morrow, going to seek my fortune, if you can imagine it!"

"Oh, no! Are you? It's worse than I thought," cried Jeanette aghast. "What a pity, what a shame! And all for me, to save me from being a wretched wife! How could you be so kind to me? Indeed, indeed you must let us do something about it!"

"Dear girl," said Cis, leaning forward, taking one of Jeanette's burning hands in her firm, cool, shapely ones, "you mustn't take that hard. I'm a restless fish; I've been wanting a change. I could find a job here, but I've been wanting to go away. I'm taking the chance the company's given me to pull up stakes; that's all. I'm going Monday, to Beaconhite, just for sport, so don't you worry over it, you dear!"

"Beaconhite? Oh, father could help you there! His brother is the president of the biggest bank in the city, and if you had a letter to him he'd give you something splendid, I know he would! Will

you let father give you a letter to Uncle Wilmer? Please, please say yes!" Jeanette pleaded with hands and eyes, leaning forward eagerly.

"Sure I'll say yes!" laughed Cis. "And then I'll say thank you! It'll be great not to be without a plank on a new ocean. But all I ask is that you and your father will quit feeling that you owe me anything. I knew the company would drop me, but that's nothing! I tell you I've been fidgeting lately. Anyway, what's that beside marrying the wrong sort? I've been fond of you this good while, Miss Jeanette Lucas; I've taken comfort in making believe I knew you, and that we were friends. Funny, maybe, but all girls have sort of far-off crushes, I guess! Then, when I'd a chance to be a friend to you in good earnest, you'd better believe I liked it! So that's all there is to that, my dear!"

Jeanette looked at Cis hard and long, then she leaned over to her and kissed her. "Strange," she said slowly. "You have come into my life deeply with one stride. No other girl is bound up into my life as you are. As long as I live I shall remember you, the girl who saved me. I shall keep your face, your wonderful red hair, in my mind when I am old and feeble—if I live to be so! It doesn't seem as though I could go on living, but I know people can't die because they no longer really live. We are friends, dear, and your sweet, queer dream of me came true."

"I'm so sorry about you, I ache," said Cis simply. "What are you going to do, what will become of you? Don't talk of dying!"

"Father is going to take me to Europe for six months. That's all I know of a future," said Jeanette. "I'm stunned; it doesn't seem true most of the time. Then it is the only truth in all the world, and I reel under the feeling that all else, all I trusted and believed, is false. I never knew wicked people, and if the one who seemed noblest, best, is treacherous, wicked, how do I know, how do I know? I'm not easy to transplant, Cicely; my roots won't take hold again. But your clear, changing, warm, pitying face looks true. My father and my mother are good, good and dear! I must find my way. Don't you think I shall?"

"Stop brooding over it," advised Cis, out of her complete ignorance. "There's not a man born worth worrying over. Set it down to experience, and quit thinking of it." Jeanette looked at her wondering, then a faint smile passed over her face, hardly more than the shadow of one, but Cis rejoiced in it.

"That's good advice, dear," she said quietly. "But if you have poured yourself, all of yourself, your life and all its parts, into one vessel and it is broken—how do you go on, how gather it all up, into what? Tell me this, brave, wise, ignorant Cicely Adair! Don't love anyone, Cicely; it hurts!"

"Well," said Cicely, "I hope I sha'n't. I like people lots, but I never wanted anyone so I lay awake five minutes wanting them. I must go now. You've been mighty good to me. I was afraid you might almost hate me. I think I could love you."

"You could love someone, and find it as hard as

I do; you are the sort that can love," said Jeanette. "I think I'm fond of you, Cicely Adair. I'm too numb to feel anything but the one pain that absorbs me, but I'm sure I'm fond of you. Father will send that letter to you to-morrow. I'm glad it's to be Beaconhite, where he can introduce you, but I'm sorry, sorry you are suffering through me."

"Not a bit of it! I love to go, honest! I was brought up by strangers; my mother died long ago; I live in lodgings; what's the difference? Goodbye, you dear, dear, lovely Miss Lucas! Go to sleep; you look all in. When I think I made you look like that——"

Jeanette shook her head, and took both of Cicely's hands.

"It was a blessed deed, dear," she said. "I sent for you to tell you I'm grateful; not to thank you, because I can't. We are friends, Cicely. We can't be parting for always; we have been drawn too close. Will you let me know what happens to you, if letters aren't too burdensome to you?"

"I'll tell you, if you care," said Cis. "Goodbye."

Jeanette followed Cis to the head of the stairs, and rang for the maid to show her out. Cis looked back, smiling up and waving her hand half way down.

Jeanette leaned over the broad mahogany rail, her soft silken negligée drawn around her, her eyes burning in their pallid setting, her dark hair loosely shading her face, her white lips pitifully pulled into a smile for Cicely.

Cicely, boyish, unscathed by suffering or desire, yet knew that the girl, Jeanette Lucas, whom she had idealized, had died under that surgery by which she had cut off from her what would have slain her.

Cis walked slowly down the street, pondering the mystery of this contradictory truth.

CHAPTER IV

TRANSPLANTING

CIS spent her last night before setting out to try her fortune, Sunday night, with Nan in the Dowling, pleasant, somewhat crowded little house.

Mr. Lucas had sent to Cicely the letter of introduction to his brother in Beaconhite, promised her by Jeanette. Briefly, but forcibly, it expressed Mr. Lucas' conviction that Cicely Adair was a person whose ability and fidelity were of the highest order; that he, therefore, felt no hesitation in asking his brother to place her to her advantage, in acknowledgment of a debt which Mr. Lucas owed her and which he did not hope ever fully to cancel.

Cis read the unsealed letter with an elated sense of being armed to meet her new, experimental venture, and hurried around the corner to the public telephone station to call up Miss Lucas, thank her and her father, and tell her that now she knew that she was all right, though she had never been fearful, and to bid Miss Lucas good-bye again, with the injunction not to worry over her. "Or anything else," Cis added as an afterthought.

Then she went back to her lodgings, finished putting into her suitcase the articles which she needed for that night and her first night in Beacon-

hite, took a quick, humorous survey of her room, which embraced its every detail, and waved her hand to it, nodding farewell.

"Good-bye, good luck, friend Room," she said. "You're not much of a home, but you've been mine over two years. Hope you get on well with your new chum, and get dusted regularly, and that she won't make a fuss over that loose board, nor the broken blind fastening. Wonder if I'll sleep as well in my new room as I've slept in you? One thing, I've never in my life had anything to keep me awake nights, so far!"

She took up the suitcase, waiting beside her—it was not light, though it held no heavy articles, but there never was a light suitcase, however packed—and went down the stairs.

Her landlady was awaiting her; she came out of the dining room when she heard Cis's step, to wish her good luck and bid her good-bye.

"I hope you won't be sorry, Miss Adair," she said, without any indication that she considered the hope well-founded. "Personally, I think no one could find a better place than the city we live in, but maybe Beaconhite ain't so bad. You've been a good lodger; always pleasant; prompt with your payments; reg'lar in hours, and you never abused the light priv'lege with an iron, or any such. I'm sorry to lose you; I can truthf'ly say that much, and I wish you well, wherever it may be."

"Thanks, Miss Spencer. We've got on fine, take it as a whole, and I hope the next one in my room may be taken wholier—holier might easily mean

two things!" laughed Cis. "Good-bye, good luck! Look after the cat; I like that cat, and she'll miss my petting. Animals need more than mere food. Good-bye!"

"Now I'm launched!" thought Cis, going off down the street, having shut the front door for the last time with her customary vigorous slam. "No, I'm not! Supper at Dowlings' and the night there first, then I'll really be launched! I like Nan heaps, but her mother is quite advice-full!"

Mrs. Dowling was not perfectly sure about Cis, as Cis was sharp enough to perceive. She did not like her indifferent brand of Catholicity, but aside from that, she found nothing to condemn in the girl, or had not so far. "So far" summed up Mrs. Dowling's attitude toward Cicely; when Nan told her mother that she knew no other girl so intrinsically upright and pure-minded, Mrs. Dowling always said: "I hope she is!" and Nan was helpless to defend Cis against a charitable hope, however dubiously expressed.

Cis was too attractive to men to be wholly trustworthy, Mrs. Dowling felt, with the bias of the rather dull woman who has married the one man who ever noticed her. She could not understand the vivacity that drew others, combined with the nature that allowed no one to pass within definite barriers.

Then young Tom Dowling, only a year and a half Cicely's junior, found her far too charming; it was bad enough that Nan was her humble adorer, but Tom was another matter. Mrs. Dowling was

one of the many women who mistake jealousy for love of their children. Down in the bottom of her heart, Mrs. Dowling felt sure that the act of Providence which removed Cicely Adair from her present field was easily understood, corroborative of her secret misgivings.

Nan and Cicely were bedfellows that last night; like true girls they talked far into it of their views, their hopes, Cicely's adventure, of Jeanette Lucas and the risks and promises of marriage.

Cis declared that she did not want to marry, nor ever would marry unless there came into her life a man who so filled it that she would be maimed and crippled, lacking him. That man, she added, she did not believe existed. Cis felt self-sufficient, rejoicing in her ability to take care of herself.

Nan, on the other hand, did not mind acknowledging that she thought that she could be quite fond enough of a man to marry him and be happy with him without a cataclysmic passion; he must be good, she added, like a wise little second Eve, because, chiefly, she hoped that she would have many children and she would want their father to be an example to them.

Cis laughed aloud at this, and Nan smothered the laugh in the bedclothes, fearing to disturb her mother at one o'clock.

"I don't believe many girls pick out a man for the sake of their children; I'm dead sure I'd pick him for myself," declared Cis.

"I don't care; they ought to," maintained Nan stoutly. "How can you bring up children well if

their father is bad? And if he's a good father, he'll make his wife happy. All women are first of all mothers of souls, like the first woman."

She admitted to Cicely's gleeful questioning that she had derived this idea from a mission sermon; in return for which admission Cicely admitted that she had no doubt it was quite right; that she couldn't object to it as long as she herself didn't have to marry posterity's ancestor.

Breakfast was somewhat hurried. Beaconhite was distant over a hundred miles, but its inaccessibility counted for more hours' travelling than the miles. To reach it Cis must go to New York; cross there to another railway station, and start again for her destination, therefore she was to take an early train to New York.

Tom and Nan were going to see her off. Mrs. Dowling put up a delicious lunch for Cis, and gave it to her with the utmost kindness, and much excellent advice as to conditions and conduct of which young Cicely, accustomed to the world and to make her way in it from her childhood, knew ten times as much as the older woman, and had practically and instinctively formulated her own rules.

"And, my dear," Mrs. Dowling ended, "I wish you'd at once go and call on some fine priest, get him interested in you. You're a girl that needs it, though all do who are alone like you. And where'll you stay to-night, till you find a nice room, in a decent house? And how'll you know what any house's like in a new place, unless you call

on the priest and he sends you to the right one? You can't be too careful, Cicely; you heed what one who is old enough to be your mother tells you."

"I wouldn't know what to say to the priest if I called on him, Mrs. Dowling," laughed Cis. "I'll stay at a hotel, pick out a good one. I've made up my mind to take a week off, not present my letter to that other Mr. Lucas for a bit. I'll get a hotel for five dollars a day, I'm sure, and I've decided to spend thirty-five dollars on myself laying off, sizing up Beaconhite for a week. Then I'll roll up my sleeves and pitch in. I may get acquainted with some decent young fellow of my own age. You take a risk when you pick up a girl, but with a boy you don't. Then a boy never misunderstands you; you can be honest and friendly with a boy, and he'll always see it if you're straight, and play right up to you, good chum-fashion, not looking for trouble, nor for anything behind your jolly good times. I'll try to find a nice boy, first, in Beaconhite and he can steer me to his sister, or his cousins, and other girls. Isn't that all so, Tom?"

"Right you are, Cis!" cried Tom. "Fellows know what girls mean—worse luck! It wouldn't be half bad if a chap couldn't always dope you out so easy."

"Cicely Adair, I wish you had a mother!" cried Mrs. Dowling.

"Don't you suppose I do?" Cis exclaimed. "The right sort; but we always think our mother would have been the right sort, if we'd had her, of course!

You've been kind, Mrs. Dowling; indeed I thank you for it. Don't worry about me. I don't believe I'll take a plunge; I sort of believe in my luck. I'm going to keep in mind that I've got to be the old maid godmother to Nan's children, and that she'll expect a perfect lady for the part! Isn't it time we were getting off, children? If you make me lose that train you can stop down in town and order crepe for your mother to put on!"

"Loads of time, Cis," said Tom. "However, we may as well mosey along. No use putting off amputation; hurts any time."

He picked up Cicely's suitcase, went outside, pulling his hat down over his eyes, to wait with a gloomy face while Cis bade good-bye to his mother and the rest of his family.

"Rotten! No sense in her going!" muttered Tom under his breath.

At the station there were many others waiting to see Cicely Adair on her way.

Young Tom had no chance for a tender leave-taking, for which Cis was devoutly grateful. Now that the time to go had come, Cis found herself moved by the parting. After all, one's native place and lifelong acquaintances mean a great deal, even to self-confident youth.

Cis wrapped little Nan in a close embrace and her bright eyes were dimmed by the tears which did not fall; Cis was not a crying girl. Nan wept aloud, in spite of Cis's promise to return.

"You'll never come back, not the same, anyway.

We're too young to part and join on again without changes," sobbed Nan, unexpectedly far-seeing.

Cis settled into her seat next the window with a long breath of relief; she disliked feeling emotionally upset, it puzzled her and offended her with herself; she was unaccustomed to distress of mind.

She took off her small close hat, rumpled her bright locks which it had flattened, and leaned her head against the window to watch obliquely as long as she could see them, those whom she was leaving. Then, when the last handkerchief and waving straw hat had been lost to view, Cis burrowed in her hand-bag for a tiny powder box and puff, held up a small mirror and dusted her eyelids and the tip of her nose, restored the vanity articles to their place, pulled a magazine from the straps of the suitcase at her feet, selected the box of candy of the five beside her which promised her keenest pleasure, and settled herself for the journey to New York. If there were no use in crying over spilled milk, neither was there any use in spilling tears over partings which she herself had chosen should occur.

It was half after four that afternoon when Cis found herself being pulled slowly into the station of the city which she had selected as the scene of her winter residence, chiefly on the whimsical ground that it spelled its name Beaconhite when it obviously should have been Beaconheight.

There was a better approach to this small city

of some hundred thousand inhabitants than is commonly found along railway tracks, and the station, with its roofed-over platforms covering outlying tracks, and flower beds along its banks at either end, was attractive.

"You look quite spiffy, Beaconhite, my dear, but handsome is as handsome does; we'll wait to find out what you do to me!" thought Cis, playing with herself after her usual fashion.

Cis "grabbed a 'bus in the dark," as she told herself, one of three which bore the names of hotels, this one being "The Beacon Head," which hit Cis's fancy: it chanced to be the best hotel in town; not the most pretentious, but the most dignified and well-conducted.

"Luck's holding!" thought Cis, having registered and been assigned a room at her limit of price, and finding the room comfortable, well-furnished, its two windows giving, one on an enclosed court, but the other on the main street.

Cis went to bed early, after a remarkably well-cooked, nicely served dinner. She debated going out in search of amusement, but decided for early sleep and a long night.

"If you're going to spend a week loafing, my girl, you'll have a hard enough job putting in the time, and when you've got to work at enjoying yourself, don't make the job harder by plunging the first night, using up scanty materials for fun," she advised herself, taking the lift to her room on the second floor merely for the luxury of it, though she preferred walking up stairs.

Cis awoke early, thoroughly refreshed, but she carried out her principle of compelling herself to be luxurious by not rising till after eight. Then, bath and breakfast over, she sallied out to see the city.

Cis found Beaconhite greatly to her liking; she came back to the Beacon Head with a good appetite, and the conviction that here she should like to stay. She would not defer presenting her letter of introduction till the end of the week; she would present it to Mr. Wilmer Lucas the day after tomorrow. It was not likely that she would at once step into employment; she must allow time for a position to be found for her, so she would be prudent, and use her introduction sooner than she had intended doing. In reality, one forenoon of luxurious idleness had shown active Cis that many days so spent would undermine her spirits and her patience.

On the third day after her arrival in Beaconhite, Cis made herself trig and trim in the well-cut suit which she was wearing that summer, with a fine fresh shirt-waist, and her simple white hat. She had dressed carefully and looked her best; she sallied forth to call on Mr. Wilmer Lucas less hopeful than confident.

She found the bank of which Mr. Lucas was president, to which Jeanette Lucas had directed her to find her uncle, a really impressively magnificent building, its furnishings and finish declaring its assets; its architecture and material announcing its security. Mr. Lucas, she was told, did not come

to the bank every day; this was one of the mornings on which he was to be found in his law office. It was not far from the bank; Cis turned her steps thither, and was shown into Mr. Lucas' private office after a sufficient time had elapsed for him to read the introductory letter from his brother, which Cis sent in to him by the messenger who came forward to her in the outer office.

"Miss Adair?" said Mr. Lucas as Cis entered. "My brother has spoken of you in the highest terms, as you probably know. Will you be seated, if you please?"

Cis took the straight chair before the desk, so placed as to give Mr. Lucas the advantage of the light from the window above it, full on her face. He looked at her keenly, and what he saw seemed to satisfy him, for he nodded almost imperceptibly, with a softening of his glance that betokened acceptance of Cis. Cis's bright, irregular face, with its straightforward look of humorous kindliness invariably won for her friends, and, from elder, experienced people, appraisal and trust.

Cis on her part saw a man older than the Mr. Lucas whom she had often seen at her home; a large man, greyed around the temples, with a face that was harder than his brother's face; an intellectual face that might reveal selfishness, but did not indicate self-indulgence. Cis felt a little afraid of him, yet to herself she characterized him as "the real thing," and decided that it would be agreeable to be in the employ of such a fine gentleman.

"My brother tells me that you would like a position, Miss Adair, or implies that. What can you do?" Mr. Lucas asked.

"I write a clear hand, that can be read; I am quick at figures; I know shorthand and can type. I can do as I'm told," Cis added the final statement with a twist of her lips, a sudden, crooked little smile that revealed her strong white teeth.

"Great virtue, that last," commented Mr. Lucas, his eyes reflecting Cis's smile.

"My brother speaks of his obligation to you; may I ask in what way you have put my brother under obligations to you?"

Cis shook her head. "Sorry, Mr. Lucas, but that can't come into my dealing with you, if I'm lucky enough to deal with you. It wasn't such a great obligation; it wasn't doing anything worth talking about, but you'll see that I can't talk about other people's affairs, even your brother's, or—" Cis caught herself up short.

"'Or'? Well, Miss Adair, I suppose that you are within your rights in refusing to answer me, but you will see that I, also, have rights; that I should know all about a person whom I employ?" said Mr. Lucas.

"It's not so much within my rights, Mr. Lucas, as within my duty," said Cis, with her sunny smile of good fellowship, as if she expected Mr. Lucas to understand and sympathize with her. "I'll tell you anything under the sun that you want to know about myself."

"Why have you left your home? Why were you not able to find employment there?" asked Mr. Lucas, his voice intentionally made harsher.

"I left my home for no reason at all, just because I wanted to shake myself. I think I could have found employment there; I didn't try. I wanted a change," said Cis promptly. "But I'm going to tell you that I was employed in the Telephone Exchange and was dismissed for breaking an important rule. So now you know the worst they'd tell you of me at home."

"Broke an important rule? Yet you this moment told me you could obey. Did you break it deliberately?" demanded Mr. Lucas.

"Yes, Mr. Lucas, and I knew they'd bounce—dismiss me. Please don't ask anything more about it, because the rest of it doesn't concern me; it concerns someone else." Cis looked at Mr. Lucas appealingly, yet with a frank certainty that he would trust her.

"H'm," Mr. Lucas murmured. "I am a lawyer, Miss Adair; my specialty is collecting and weighing evidence for my firm. Let me see: You were a telephone girl; you broke an important rule; you were dismissed, as you foresaw that you would be for that disobedience; my brother feels profoundly indebted to you; his daughter, Jeanette, is the very core of his heart; she was to have been married shortly; she is not to be married, I hear; she discovered that her lover was perfidious, unworthy; how did she discover it? Heh?" He bent his keen eyes, frowningly upon Cis.

"The newspapers said that the marriage was off; they didn't tell us anything else about it," said Cis, but she turned crimson and looked alarmed.

"Did you ever see my niece, Jeanette Lucas?" persisted Mr. Lucas, and as Cis nodded, he added: "Lovely girl, lovely in mind as well as body!"

"I saw her at a bazaar, spoke to her, and I've loved her ever since; she's the loveliest thing!" cried Cis fervently, then stopped, confused as she saw Jeanette's uncle smile.

"Very well, Miss Adair," he said, pushing over some papers on his table and leaning back in his chair as if to indicate the end of the interview. "I will see about your application. I suppose you are applying for a position with me? I may tell you that I need someone who can be trusted, rather unusually trusted, with matters which must be absolutely and completely buried within these walls. I need a confidential clerk who will take down notes for me, write letters, and whose honor must be beyond suspicion, beyond the reach of temptation by bribery or cajoling, whose discretion must be equal to her—or his—honor. I may say that I am inclined to forecast the use of the feminine pronoun; it has been my experience that women are loyal to the death, if they are capable of loyalty at all, and that, when they are to be trusted, there is less danger of advantageous offers to betray winning them over, than there is of men's being so led away. If I took you on could you begin next Monday?"

"That would just suit me. I thought I'd like

a week off before I took up anything, though it's going to be long enough, too!" Cis laughed at herself.

"Habits are our masters, Miss Adair; work gets its iron hold on us quite as tight as any other vice," observed Mr. Lucas. "Learn to loaf while you're still young."

To his satisfaction Cis laughed up at him—they had both risen—her eyes spilling over fun, her lips parted, a hitherto unrevealed dimple appearing in one cheek.

His solemn warning was not mistaken by her for serious earnest.

"I think she will do; I think Robert has estimated her justly. She would not tell me anything that might betray confidence, or her inside knowledge of the other Lucas family's affairs. I need a girl who can hold her tongue, and be loyal. Somehow, she is the source of Jeanette's discovery of her lover's perfidy. I think she'll do exceedingly well."

These thoughts ran through Mr. Lucas' mind as he politely bowed Cis out of his office, but all that he said to her was:

"You shall hear from me not later than Saturday. At the Beacon Head? I see you wrote that address on the envelope which you sent in to me. Good morning, Miss Adair. Not later than Saturday; sooner, I think. Good morning."

"Luck still running strong, Cis dear!" Cis gaily told herself as she walked fast away from the office. "He's going to take you on. He's like a duke and

the Tower of London, combined with a magnifying glass which shows how you're working inside, but I think I'll like the combination, especially the duke part of it! I must go back and write Nan all about it; she'll be worrying over lucky me, little goose!"

CHAPTER V

THE PINCH OF NECESSITY

BY FRIDAY of the week of her arrival in Beaconhite, Cis found herself a burden on her own hands. Five days of what had become compulsory idleness and pursuit of pleasure, were too many for the nerves of active Cis Adair, trained by her lifelong habit into ways of industry.

Beaconhite did not offer enthralling pleasure to dwellers on its surface. There were theatres, one principal one, two insignificant ones, a vaudeville house, but even to the best of these, first-class companies did not come; this week the third-class company which was giving a metropolitan success for six nights and a matinée in Beaconhite, had already been seen by Cis when they were doing the same thing in her native city. There were "movies," but Cis happened to be one of those persons to whom silent drama is annoying; she wanted the spoken line, and disliked the necessary exaggeration of the pictures. She went one night to see again the play which she had already seen, and another night to the moving pictures; here she found a film showing, which she had seen twice before, and this, added to her dislike for this form of entertainment, sent her back to her hotel in a bad temper.

She had hoped to hear from Mr. Wilmer Lucas by this time, founding the hope upon his suggestion that he might communicate with her before Saturday, but no word came from him.

"Looking up my record at home, maybe, though Mr. Robert Lucas' letter ought to be enough for him," thought Cis. "Goodness, if he shouldn't take me at all! I'll be dippy if I hang around after Monday; all I can do to hold out till then! If I don't get into Mr. Lucas' office, I'll have to take a job at anything, good or bad; I'll kick the stall out if I'm left standing any longer. Besides, I can't stay on at $5.00 per, at the Beacon Head longer than that; $35.00 is my limit to spend on loafing—and I haven't had my money's worth so far!"

Cis realized, as she had not done, how much she had depended upon companionship. She had earned her living among girls, some of whom she had liked, some disliked, to the great majority of whom she had been indifferent; but they were quick-witted, full of life and spirits; "they kept things moving," Cis told herself, and the days spent without anyone to speak to except a hotel clerk, a chambermaid, waiter and bell boy, grew oppressive.

Cis tried to talk to some of the attractive girls who were always to be met in the lobby, the elevator, in the dining room, but all of them froze up when she made advances to them; all but one replied to her small talk, but replied so forbiddingly that Cis did not persist.

"Afraid I may be the wrong sort and that it'll come off!" thought Cis. "Idiots! How do you ever get anywhere in this world if you tote a shell around, like a snail? Miss a lot if you don't try people out first, and freeze up afterward, provided you find them the kind that needs dropping! I wanted to jar poor Mrs. Dowling when I said what I did about picking up boy acquaintances, but it's the truth, nevertheless. I'm going to look around for a nice fellow and try him out, see if he won't be bold enough to risk a decent answer. I've got to get someone started, that's sure! This hotel and town are getting to feel like a diving bell, 'way down below human noises."

With deliberate intention to carry out her plan, purvey to her need, Cis scanned the male portion of her fellow guests in the hotel for the rest of that day and evening, but none measured up to her requirement. They were a lot of average young Americans, but the frank face, the business-like air, the quality of manliness that conveyed the ability to understand and meet her like a fellow-being, not like a girl seeking attentions, seemed to Cis wanting to them all.

She went to bed lonely and discouraged, somewhat inclined to tears, but so healthy-minded that she quickly fell asleep instead of crying. Her last waking thought was that if Beaconhite showed her no jolly, sensible girls, no friendly, chummy boys, it was no place for Cis Adair, and that she might move on by Monday, Mr. Lucas or no Mr. Lucas.

Friday morning found Cis refreshed and ready

to postpone her decision to move on, also quite sure that before the day was over she should hear from Mr. Lucas that he was ready to test her in the highly honorable position of his confidential clerk. Therefore her merry face was as bright as ever when she had finished her toilette and came down to breakfast like a sun maiden, all in white, her red hair gloriously shining above her snowy raiment.

Two young men breakfasting together looked smilingly up at Cis as she passed their table, unmistakably ready to leap out into acquaintances at the least sign of welcome from her; indeed one of them slightly pushed out the chair next to him, leaning forward with an ingratiating smile. Cis knew the type and "had no time for it," she would have said. "Call themselves men!" Cis once had exclaimed to Nan.

After her solitary breakfast, which she enjoyed as a hungry girl should, Cis turned her mind upon the problem of how to dispose of that day; she found it insoluble. "May as well take a trolley and ride till it stops, but of all stupid things, sliding along past a lot of houses is the worst! Wish I had my bunch of little newsys here! Wonder if they miss me badly, poor little scraps! I made Tom Dowling promise he'd do something for them."

Cis left the dining room and went to the desk. Here she found two letters in the pigeonhole that bore the number of her room, but neither was from Mr. Lucas, as she had been sure one must

be. There was a brief note from Jeanette Lucas in reply to one which Cis had written her, telling her that she had seen her uncle and that he held out hope of a position for her. Miss Lucas said nothing of herself beyond that she was to sail for Europe the following week. She wrote to Cis with much more than the politeness of a slight acquaintance; the short note breathed warmth of feeling for Cis, and a personal sadness that depressed Cis, though she could not have said wherein it lay.

The other letter was a long one from Nan, full of love and longing for Cis, and all the trivial news of the office, her home, their common acquaintances, which are such important items to an exile, just because they are so homely and unimportant. Cis folded this letter and slipped it into her pocket with homesick heaviness of heart that surprised her. "Of course there's nothing to prevent me from going back if I want to," she reminded herself.

Deciding against the trolley trip, Cis arose from the leather seat upon which she had been sitting, and began to stroll up and down the lobby, and down its adjacent corridors, returning on her beat. One of the corridors had shop-like rooms up and down its length, rented for various sorts of business—a little toy shop, candy shop, book shop, flower shop, a shop for fancy work materials, all sorts of attractive things offered for sale; while a manicure, a chiropodist, a barber and a bootblack were lodged there, in their respective rooms, to

minister to the personal comfort of the patrons of the hotel, and people from beyond its walls.

The bootblack's establishment especially attracted Cis's eye; it was the apotheosis of the elevated chair and foot rest and the active little Italian ministrant, to be found on street corners. Here were several chairs, better said, thrones; the walls were panelled in attractive colors; there were hangings of deep yellow, framing the casement of the door and one window at the rear; a table, with papers and magazines upon it, in its centre a well-shaped vase holding two perfect yellow roses.

Cis looked into this palace of charity to wayworn shoes, admiring its perfection. There were two or three assistants at work on as many customers, and there were two other customers waiting to have their shoes polished. In a chair unmistakably comfortable sat one of these waiting customers; he was reading a magazine. As Cis loitered, looking in at the open door from the hotel corridor, this customer turned over his magazine, which he held doubled over for convenience in reading it, and his eyes met Cis's eyes.

He was exceedingly good looking, dark haired, blue eyed, fresh tinted, with well-cut features, but it was not for his good looks that Cis instantly decided that here was the person for whom she had been seeking. It was rather for an indescribable air of man of the world about him; the ease of his excellent clothes and their manner of wearing; his steady, unembarrassed gaze, that did

not intrude upon her, yet seemed to take Cis in as to her every detail, to approve her and like her, be ready to meet her friendliness on its own ground; "be a human being," Cis would have summed it up. But there was no denying that this young man possessed decided good looks and instant charm which were not a necessary part of the qualifications upon which Cis had insisted as a part of the outfit of the person whom she should adopt as the one who should make her wilderness blossom with comradery.

Cis Adair had never hesitated to take anything that she wanted, nor, if it did not come after her, to go out after it. She had never wanted anything that was forbidden by the highest, nor the lower laws, but she invariably reached out after what she wanted. Now she glanced down at her shoes, which were shapely, fine as to leather, and which she decided were enough in need of polishing to warrant her treating them to it. She entered the attractive shop.

The customers happened at that moment to be all men, but Cis had no shyness with men; she was nearer to shy with women. She came in without embarrassment, though every eye turned on her. The young man who had innocently trolled her hither at once got upon his feet; the other waiting customer did not move.

"This is the most comfortable chair," he said, indicating the one which he had just vacated for Cis. "Please take it; I'll sit here." He dropped

into the chair next beyond his former one, which Cis took with a hearty "Thank you," and a bright smile. His voice was quite beautiful, soft, rich, mellow, caressing, like a musical cadence, as he spoke these few words.

"I never saw a bootblacking place like this," Cis commented.

"No. There can't be many as nice. There's one in Chicago that—well, we won't say it is better, because we ought to be loyal to our own city, but it's by way of peachiness," said the young man, and his smile was as gay and bright as Cis's own, and it revealed two dimples to her one.

"I don't have to be loyal to Beaconhite," said Cis. "I'm a stranger, staying in this hotel, but I don't mind sticking up for its bootblack."

"I fancy you'd be good at sticking up for anything that you felt belonged to you," said the young man, and Cis suddenly perceived that he was not as young a man as she had at first thought him. His brilliant coloring, his grace and charm gave him the effect of greater youth than was his. Cis decided that he was well on in his twenties, if not just beyond them, and this somewhat checked her readiness to take him on in the capacity of good fellowship. Yet this was silly, she told herself; a good fellow was one at any age. What did it matter if this one were anywhere from five to ten years her senior?

"You aren't a Beaconhitette then?" he went on. "That's hard luck. Now I am. I wasn't always;

came here last year, in fact, but I'm living here, and may go on living here, till I cease living altogether. You're a jolly girl; you ought to stay."

His eyes were keen on Cis's face, handsome eyes, softly blue, somewhat veiled by dark lashes, yet seeing eyes that could be keen as they now were, studying this singular girl who was so ready to talk, yet did not strike him as bold, but rather as maidenly. "Boyish sort, I think, but you never can be sure of them at first," thought the man.

"I may stay on," Cis was answering meanwhile. "I came to stay, if things worked out; got tired of the place where I'd always lived, and jumped off. I've a letter to Mr. Lucas, here, and he may have a position for me by Monday."

"You're one of the independent army, then?" asked the young man. "Well, you don't look like a pampered, spoiled one! (This partly explains her") he thought. "Do you mean Wilmer Lucas? Dear me! Your letter was addressed high up in the line of this town; Wilmer Lucas is *the* big man of Beaconhite!"

"That's the way he struck me," agreed Cis. "There's a chair vacant for you."

"Certainly not; you take it," protested the young man.

"Not a bit of it! You were here first; I'm not one of the sort that wants to grab privilege, because I'm a girl. I'm in the world like a man, and I like give and take; straight play. Besides, I'm just killing time; I've nowhere to go, nothing to do till I get my position—if I do!" said Cis.

The young man glanced down at Cis's shoes, which were not badly in need of polishing. He was far too attractive not to have known long ago that women liked to talk to him, admired his face and manner. Had this girl come in because she saw him, and wanted to make the acquaintance of so personable a young man? She had said that she was killing time. He speculated upon Cis while he took the chair which she refused, and the attendant treated his shoes, which sadly needed it.

The next chair vacated was Cis's in justice; the other man who had been waiting a turn had preceded Cis's acquaintance; his shoes had been attended to and he had quickly gone out.

Cis mounted her chair, and another attendant dressed and polished her shoes, which her neighbor and acquaintance viewed with approval.

He was through before Cis, but he lingered; in an instant, after hesitating, he turned to her, and said:

"You are merely killing time, and I've nothing on this morning; I'm going to wait for you."

"That's nice of you!" cried Cis heartily. "I hoped you would. It's pretty punk being alone, a stranger in a strange land."

She paid her charge, dismounted, and went out into the hotel corridor, followed by her new acquaintance, still somewhat uncertain how to take Cis, but considerably helped in an accurate estimate of her by the boyish frankness with which she had acknowledged hoping that he would wait for her.

"How about going into the tea room and fitting on our labels?" suggested the young man. "There's not likely to be anyone there at this hour, and I feel it in my bones that we've not met just to part, so we ought to waste no time in learning whom we've met, each of us. Names matter less; they're only labels, but I'd like to have you tell me all about yourself. You're not like most girls."

"All right; tea room is all right," assented Cis. "It won't take me long to tell you about Cecily Adair; she's *just* like other girls!"

"That's never your name! Why it's a song!" cried the young man.

"Mine, though!" laughed Cis. "I'm called Cis. Haven't you a name; chorus or hymn, if mine's a song?"

"Yes, but it's just a name, nothing in the musical line. Hope you don't mind names parted in the middle? My name is George Rodney Moore, but I use the middle name, sign G. Rodney, you know," said the young man, and he looked as if he really hoped that Cis would not disapprove his name.

"Gee! Rodney!" cried Cis, but quickly added, as if she feared to hurt him by what was not ridicule, but unavoidable nonsense:

"Rodney is a fine name; I like it. I don't blame you for shedding the George, and using it. I suppose I'd drop George altogether, and keep only Rodney, but you can do that later, if you want to. Oh, do you like stuffy tea rooms? Why not go out into the air—that is, if you really want to lighten my gloom?"

"It's the other way about, Miss Adair. I should like being out on this fine day, but you surely have been taught by this time that you are sent into the world to lighten the gloom of any man whom you will tolerate," G. Rodney Moore said experimentally.

They had turned toward the side entrance of the hotel; in the doorway Cis stopped short.

"See here, none of that; cut it out, if you please," she said. "I like boys, but I don't like them one bit when they forget I'm not one, and you wouldn't say that sort of thing to a boy, now would you?"

"No, I'm free to confess that I would not!" cried Moore, and he chuckled. "All right, old chap, you're the kind that makes it jolly for a pal—better?"

"Heaps!" said Cis, and laughed. "You lead; you know the country and I don't."

"Like to walk? Because I know a nice place, but it's fairly far, and taxis grow in this soil, if you'll have one," suggested Moore.

"I'm a walker; I'll risk the distance," replied Cis, and they started out.

Three miles from the Beacon Head they came into a pretty glade, wooded, suggestive at a glance of song birds and flowers. Here they seated themselves, Cis on a bank, G. Rodney Moore just below her. All the way there they had talked, Cis with her customary frankness, till, on their arrival, Moore had justly decided that she was exactly what she seemed and announced herself to be; a single-minded, honest girl, of extraordinary directness

and simplicity; lonely, wanting comradeship, not hesitating to take it where she should find it, with confidence that she would find understanding where she found congeniality, and without the smallest shade of coquetry, or of hidden purpose.

"Mighty odd, quite unique, but the gods were good to me when they let her decide that I'd answer for a stop-gap till she got acquainted in Beaconhite. Never saw her equal! It will be my own fault if I let her drift away from me, and I won't!" he told himself, listening to Cis's merry talk, watching her changing face, all gay laughter and wholesome sweetness, its red hair framing it in an aureole, wind-made.

Cis told Rodney all about herself; he told her some things about himself. They were friends at the end of the little excursion, "pals," Cis liked to call it, finding this "pal" more delightful than any other she had known; clever, humorous, charming. She did not hesitate to speak of this charm.

"I didn't know anyone but a girl had your kind of fun; boys don't usually know how to play your way," Cis cried delightedly. "You're lots of fun, and you're really as nice as you can be!"

"I'm not a boy, Cicely," Rodney replied, a trifle sadly—they were Cicely and Rodney by this time. "I don't suppose I played this way when I was a boy, but I had the material in me and experience cultivated it. Glad you like me, jolly Cicely."

"Yes, I do. It was luck that made me find you to-day; I knew luck was running my way when I came to Beaconhite! Aren't you a boy, quite

young, anyway? You haven't told me that," said Cis.

"I'm thirty, shall be thirty-one next spring, and that's beyond boyhood. Why do you lay such stress on boyhood, my dear? Neither it, nor girlhood lasts," he said.

"I shall be twenty-two on Christmas Day," said Cis slowly. "I don't know why, but I belong with boys; I don't belong with grown men."

"Only with this grown man. We're friends, and dates don't alter it," he said quickly. "Were you born on Christmas Day? What a sell! Shame, Pal-Cicely."

"Shame? Why is it? I always liked it a lot; nice day to be born on, seems to me," cried Cis. "The whole world glad on your birthday, and——" she checked herself.

"Does you out of a separate *festa*, and additional gifts," said Rodney. "But your magnificent hair would serve for Christmas decorations; I never saw such hair, Cicely! I'm going to call you Holly; do you mind?"

"Not I!" Cis laughed delightedly. "It isn't that kind of red, but it's pretty flaring."

"It is glorious; copper, gold and pure flame! Wouldn't Titian have had a fit over it! Holly, I hate to say it, but if we're to lunch, we've got to be getting back to it," suggested Rodney.

"I am hungry," agreed Cis. "I've had a fine morning; much obliged. You've no idea how lonely I was beginning to feel, and the girls I tried to creep up toward poked me off with icy finger-

tips, wouldn't stoop to use a whole palm! Are you going to introduce me to some nice girls?"

"Want another pal already?" Rodney said reproachfully.

"Oh, no; you're all-around satisfactory, but I do want to know girls, too. Please let me know your nicest friends," begged Cis, laughing, but in earnest.

Rodney considered. Rapidly he passed in mental review the girls whom he knew; society girls, young matrons, some of other rank. None to whom he could compare this dewy, sweet, merry, daring, innocent Cicely, none with whom he could think of her in combination.

"I'll look some up, Cicely," he said. "I had a sister, but she has been gone these many years. and would have been too old for you; older than I am. We're all right as we are for the time being, aren't we?"

"Happy as clams!" cried Cis. "Now if I get my position, with a pal in town, and a place like that—how about it?"

"Nifty!" cried Rodney. "Will you go to a show with me to-night? I know of private theatricals for a charity, and they won't be half bad. Will you go, dear young pal of mine?" He sang the refrain of the song, one word appropriately altered.

"Yes, but Dutch treat!" cried Cis, and as he was about to expostulate, she added: "Or not at all. If I'm to be a real pal, then I stand on my own, just as real pals do and should. Dutch treat? Say yes, and I'll say yes, with pleasure."

"Yes, then, but you're a girl all right; girls insist on their own way," grumbled Rodney.

Cis laughed, and threw her hat into the air, catching it deftly.

"Best of both parts, the girl's and the boy's, that's what this Cis Adair is out for, and independence comes both ways," she triumphed.

CHAPTER VI

BEGINNING

COMING back into the lobby of the Beacon Head, Cis darted ahead of Rodney Moore and up to the clerk's desk. Here in her particular pigeonhole, held down by the key of her room with its broad, portable mooring displaying the same number as the pigeonhole, lay a letter, fallen almost flat. Cis saw at once that the upper left corner bore the name she sought: "Lucas and Henderson," in exceedingly clear-cut small Roman letters, the firm address engraved below them.

"My key and mail, please," said Cis, trying to appear casual, in reality stirred by hope and fear. Somehow she did not want to leave Beaconhite; suddenly she found it desirable to stay on here, and this letter might compel her to travel on, unless she were able to stumble upon employment by strangers, to whom she had no introduction.

Cis walked back to where Rodney Moore awaited her beside a small leather-covered sofa, turning the letter in her hands.

"My verdict has come in; my lawyers have notified me," she said, dropping on the brown seat, tipping her head back against the sofa-back, unconscious that the dark brown leather made a perfect

background for her copper-red hair. "Wonder if it is that I'm to go farther?"

"No, sir! Too certain that you'd fare worse!" declared Rodney promptly. "You're not going an inch out of Beaconhite, that's flat! I can put you into something; poor enough, but enough to hold on by till you find what you want. Open up, Cicely; read your offer of $10,000 a year!"

Cis "opened up," slitting the end of the envelope with the point of her bar pin, prolonging the operation in a way unlike herself.

The communication which she unfolded was brief, compactly typed in the middle of a large page. It read:

Miss Cicely Adair,
The Beacon Head, Beaconhite.
Dear Miss Adair:—

I am prepared to offer you a position in my personal service, as my secretary. Your duties I vaguely outlined to you when you called upon me. Your salary would be, to begin, $42.00 per week, or $7.00 per day. If you prove competent, still more, if you prove satisfactory in the ways more important than mere skill, of which I spoke to you, your salary will soon exceed this sum. If this offer is acceptable to you, kindly report for duty on Monday next, at my office, at nine-thirty in the morning.

Yours truly,

Wilmer Lucas.

"Great little old snarled up signature!" commented Rodney, whom Cicely had permitted to read the letter with her. "Wouldn't be easy to forge! Not a bad salary, my Holly friend, and the

increase will be swift, or else you won't stay. Not bad. We'll have a supper after the private theatricals, to celebrate; just we two!"

"Let me off from the theatricals, please, will you, Rodney?" asked Cis. "I've been sorry I said I'd go, anyway; it'll be kind of a cross between a place where you've a right to go, and a place where you're intruding. I know 'em; they're always like that! All the friends and relations of the performers are there—like a funeral!—and they talk across to one another, and look at a person as if they wondered how on earth you broke in—selling tickets for a charity doesn't calm 'em. But what's more, I ought not to go anywhere to-night, except to boarding houses. I've got to find a place to live, if I'm going to stay in Beaconhite; can't stand $5.00 a day at this hotel, wouldn't leave much for—well, for having my shoes polished, for instance!" She stopped to enjoy her own allusion with the liquid gurgle of laughter that did not pass her throat, for which Rodney Moore had already learned to wait with anticipation.

"But it is a nice salary to begin on, isn't it? I knew Friday was my lucky day! Found a jolly pal who suits me fine, and got my job! Wonder if Christmas fell on Friday the year I was born?" Cis ended with another little suppressed laugh.

"What a girl! You don't mind letting a chap know that you think he's all right, and are glad that you found him, do you?" cried Rodney, puzzled but admiring, somewhat piqued, nevertheless; such frankness was prohibitive as well as welcoming.

"Don't mind anything that's honest! Besides, pals don't flirt. You didn't say whether you'd let me off from the movies—I mean the theatricals?" Cis said.

"What else can I do?" retorted Rodney. "If you don't want to go, I'm not going to force it. But as to boarding places, what's the matter with coming where I am? Funny old girl keeps it, but her heart's so big she has to cover it up. She sets a great table, and neat's no word for her! You could be as happy with one of her old-fashioned dinners served on the floor as on the table, and her kitchen's shining clean! You'll never find another place as good. I'll speak to Miss Gallatin, and engage the place for you; I know there's a room empty now, though it doesn't often happen."

"Good boy, Rodney Moore!" Cis approved him. "Then I won't go hunting board, but I don't want to go to the theatricals. I'll write Nan and Miss Lucas."

"You're not bidding me run away and play by myself this first evening, are you?" Rodney made a great show of consternation, but watched Cis.

"Not if you want to play with me," Cis told him. "But how about those theatricals? Thought you were booked for them."

"Oh, bother the theatricals! I've bought two tickets and that's all I'm obliged to do about them," declared Rodney. "I'd rather play with you; you're a discovery, Miss Cicely Adair."

Then he remembered the handsome girl who was playing the leading part in the theatricals that

night, the girl who had social position, wealth and glorious beauty, though not charm, nor more than a somewhat minus allowance of brains, but in regard to whom G. Rodney Moore had definite plans. He was surprised to find that he had forgotten Gertrude Davenport till Cis indirectly reminded him of her; remembering her now, her beauty did not seem so glorious as usual as his eyes rested on the varied expression of Cis's face. There was no denying that this new girl had charm and to spare.

"A discovery? Well, if it comes to that, I'm not as sure as I'd like to be that I'm the discovery; I suspect that I discovered you. Come around, if you want to, and tell me what your Miss Gallagher says about taking me to board; get her terms, and the whole thing. But if you change your mind about the theatricals, it's perfectly all right. Call me up, though, please, because if I'm not going to your boarding house I've got to hunt up another, start out early in the morning. I'll look for you at half past eight or so, but I'll not mind a speck if you go to your private theatricals. So don't feel tied up." Cis spoke with crisp cheerfulness, having risen and begun moving toward the stairs, her eyes on the clock behind the desk.

"H'm! Pleasant to be told you're as welcome to be absent as to be present, that you don't matter a whoop!" grumbled Rodney, and meant it. "I'll be around, Miss Cicely, and don't you forget it! I'd come, if it was only to begin your lessons in finding me necessary! Congratulations are in order, by the way; I forgot to offer them. You

landed a big fish when you landed the private secretaryship to Wilmer Lucas! We'll celebrate—when? To-morrow? Sunday?"

"Not to-morrow; I've got to get settled living somewhere, permanently," said Cis.

"Sunday, then? Do you lie late Sunday? Any objections to a pleasant time on that day? I don't suspect you of Puritanism! I myself get up about noon on Sunday, but I'm ready to forego my needed rest and trot you out in the forenoon. If not, we'll lunch somewhere, and go for a jolly time afterward," suggested Rodney.

"Time enough to talk about Sunday," returned Cis. "I usually get up fairly early; Sunday, too, but I don't spend the day psalm reading. Run along; I'm busy. Let me know about Miss Gallagher by telephone, or otherwise."

"Otherwise; at eight-thirty sharp. By the way, it's Gallatin, not Gallagher. Good-bye, Holly. You're a peach, and I'm glad we had our shoes polished!" cried Rodney.

Cis laughed, and ran up the stairs, scorning the elevator. At the landing she caught a glimpse of Rodney standing where she had left him, watching her. She started to turn back to wave him a supplementary farewell, but checked herself, and went on without betraying that she knew he was still there. She finished her journey up the second section of the stairway, wondering at herself. Never before in all her life had she refused herself the expression of a friendly impulse. Was it shyness? Could it be coquetry that had held her hand from

that last salute? She had never been shy; she scorned coquetry. "Air of Beaconhite doesn't agree with you, Cis, my dear old chap!" she warned herself.

Miss Hannah Gallatin was a character, as Rodney had implied. She was tall and gaunt, almost stern in manner, curt of word, severe, but there was no kinder creature in the world than this lonely maiden woman who had no one of kith nor kin on whom to lavish love, who therefore, perhaps, had taught herself not to express it except by ceaseless deeds of kindness, done as if they were penal.

She was a convert to the Catholic Church, one that would not have been predicted, but Father Morley, of St. Francis' church, himself the son of a convert to the Old Faith, had many converts to his credit; among them Hannah Gallatin, who, if she did not grace it in one sense, certainly was an honor to it in all essential senses.

To this fine, though eccentric person G. Rodney Moore repaired upon his return from the Beacon Head. In the course of his walk, meditating upon Cicely Adair, he had warmed into a great admiration for her wit, her charm, her kindliness, her unmistakable purity of thought and deed below her boyish daring, which might easily be misunderstood. Therefore the enthusiasm he felt for Cis escaped into his eyes and voice as he laid before Miss Gallatin the need that "a friend of his" had of a good home, a comfortable room, nice surroundings, "not the ordinary boarding house," he added, feeling himself diplomatically clever. "This

Miss Adair," he went on to say, "is precisely the kind of girl whom Miss Gallatin would like about; he felt proud to be the one to offer such a perfect fit, from both points of view, for Miss Gallatin's cozy room, now vacant."

"Oh!" said Miss Gallatin, regarding Rodney attentively. She did not wholly like this one of her boarders, though she knew no justification of her distrust. He had come to her, a stranger in the city; had been regular in his goings and comings; orderly in the house; agreeable to his fellow-guests; he never went to church, but Miss Gallatin knew that in the present generation of Protestants this proved nothing worse than that they had let go of the illogical anchorage of their fathers; she did not know that G. Rodney's last name had been drawn from that green sod wherein church-going was a totally different matter. If she had known that this Moore had been an Irish name in the time of its present possessor's great-grandfather, she would have exclaimed: "There!" triumphantly, but she had no suspicion that Rodney Moore had been brought up to go to Mass. "He did not show it," as she might have said. "Oh!" Miss Gallatin now exclaimed, adding at once: "Ah! Friend of yours, you say? Schoolmate? How long've you known her? Live in Beaconhite?"

"She is going to live here," said Rodney, flushing, annoyed, trying to hide it in order not to frustrate his own ends. "She has just come here, five days ago. She is to be Wilmer Lucas' secretary; his brother sent her to him, and she's not the

sort of girl to chum in with all sorts. She's an awfully nice girl, Miss Gallatin; just your kind!"

"Like me?" hinted Miss Gallatin. "Character or looks? About my complexion and figure, I'll bet a dollar! Can't be quite my age. How long did you say you'd known her?"

"Not long," said Rodney. "But I know her well; she's that frank sort that hasn't a thing to hide; fearless, straight, boyish, but not tom-boyish—get the idea? I'm perfectly sure you'll like her beyond anything. I'll bring her around this evening; she's at the Head. You can let her see the room, arrange terms, give her a look over with your eagle eye—and the thing's done! I'd like her in the house, of course; she's the kind of girl that is like a nice sister, chummy, helpful, if you get me? But for her own sake I want her here, where you'll give her just what she needs in every way. I'll bring her around; I told her I'd see her after dinner to-night."

"You'll do nothing of the sort," declared Miss Gallatin. "You told me you had tickets for the theatricals. Isn't Gertrude Davenport in 'em? Forgotten all about it? Met this new girl for the first time to-day, I'll wager! She must be something of a cyclone! You needn't bring her around, Mr. G. Rodney Moore; I'm not going to let my vacant room to her, whether all you say of her is true, or whether it isn't!"

"You're not willing so much as to show it to her? To meet her? Strange way to act, Miss Gallatin!

I am justified in resenting it," said Rodney with dignity.

"Nothing of the sort!" cried Miss Gallatin briskly. "Don't have theatricals here; better go to them. She may be a nice girl, but the nicer she is the more reason for keeping her out of the same house where the young man boards whom she got acquainted with, dear knows how! I wouldn't consider taking her, not if every room but yours was vacant! So that's settled."

"She is a fine girl, I tell you! She's not exactly pretty, but she has the sort of face you like to watch, and her hair is a wonder; loads of bright coppery red hair, and she is full of jolly, kiddish fun, straight and good. I respect her like everything. Good gracious, Miss Gallatin, I'm over thirty; do you suppose I don't know a nice girl when I see one and talk to her unreservedly? I respect Miss Adair as much as I admire her!" cried Rodney, surprised later on to find how much he cared about the defence of Cicely.

"Right! Keep on respecting her," said Miss Gallatin. "Send her to Mrs. Wallace's; she keeps a good house, sets a good table, good's mine. I won't have her here. Hold on a minute, Mr. Moore! Send her around to talk with me to-morrow, sometime. I won't let her board here, but I'll take her to see Mrs. Wallace. If she can't come to-morrow, send her Sunday. Don't you take her to Mrs. Wallace's; I will. She's a stranger here, going to work for Mr. Lucas where she'll be no-

ticed. Don't start her wrong by escorting her to look up her boarding place. People are queer things; they're more than likely to hope for the worst. Send the girl to me. I won't take her in here, but I'll do by her as I'd want done by me, if I was a young Hannah Gallatin, setting out to earn my living in a strange place. From what you say of her, she's a conspicuous sort of girl that people with keen palates for gossip will be likely to lick to get a flavor of delicious suspicion! That's the best I can do and say, so take yourself off, Mr. Moore, if you please; I've got my weekly accounts to make up, and it's always a trial to my eyes, and my nerves, also my temper—of course, after the other two!"

There was nothing for Rodney to do but to accept defeat with as much grace as he could summon. There was consolation in the thought that Miss Gallatin was willing to see Cicely, though only to conduct her to a rival house. He hoped that seeing her, Miss Gallatin might yield her position; he felt entire confidence in Cicely's ability to win anyone's complete trust and liking. There was no denying that Miss Gallatin was a wise and kind dragon in her guardianship of this girl whom she had never seen.

Sunday morning Cicely betook herself to Mass at eight o'clock, keeping up her old hour, reflecting with a sense of bewilderment that only the previous Sunday she had heard Mass in the only church which, up to this time, she had ever known, and that Nan was with her, and that she had returned

with her into the familiar Dowling household, where young Tom gloomed over their near parting and Mrs. Dowling lectured her on probable dangers which clearly implied her own deficiencies. And now she was beginning life in Beaconhite, uprooted, yet already replanted, on a larger salary, in promising conditions. She had a new friend with whom she was to do something new and pleasant that afternoon. She was a lucky Cis, she thought, kneeling, without much concentration upon it, before the altar, well in the front of the church of St. Francis Xavier at the eight o'clock Mass.

The priest who said this Mass was not young; he was remarkably tall, his shoulders contracted from the reading habit; his hair grey; his eyes deep-set and glowing with singular light; his nose large and handsome; his mouth finely cut, somewhat sad, yet ready to smile, as Cis found out when he turned to his people and began to speak after the reading of the Gospel. A remarkable man, whom Cis began to watch intently, feeling at once attracted and repulsed by him, as if she sensed in him the implanted power of the Holy Ghost which all who knew Father Morley said was his gift, the power that reads souls and irresistibly draws them.

Once Cis was sure that the priest's eyes met her own, full and steadily; that he knew her for a stranger, and measured her. She liked him, yet she feared him; coming out of the church slowly, borne by the pressure of the immense throng into the outer air, she was conscious of relief, and was glad

that it "was not her way to know the priest; that one was——"

Someone touched her arm, a tall, thin, stern looking woman, with clear, kindly eyes, at whom Cis looked questioningly, her formulation of Father Morley suspended. "Are you Miss Adair, I wonder?" asked the woman.

"Yes; Cicely Adair," replied Cis.

"I saw you were a stranger. Taking your hair, and all together, I thought you must be the girl Mr. Moore talked to me about taking. I'm Miss Gallatin, Hannah Gallatin. Come home with me; I'm going to get you a good boarding place, but not in my house. Fasting?" said Miss Gallatin, speaking with a sort of crisp rapidity.

"No; I had breakfast at the hotel as soon as the doors were opened," said Cis. "Mr. Moore said you didn't want me, because he knew me, or words to that effect."

"Neither do I, though I see he judged you right; G. Rodney always struck me as a man who could judge a woman accurately," said Miss Gallatin. "Didn't suppose you'd turn out to be a Catholic. Convert, like myself?"

"No," said Cis. "I was born one; I'm several kinds of races, all Catholic, except my mother, and she had English blood; half of her blood was English Protestant. But none of my people came from their old countries lately; they were all great or still greater grandparents who came over here, so I'm quite thoroughly American, as things go.

Goodness, I don't care a rap about such things! I'm here, Cis Adair, and what do I care!"

"Verse?" asked Miss Gallatin.

"No; worse! Just a fluke; it does rhyme, doesn't it?" laughed Cis. "Rod said you wanted to steer me to a house you knew about, though you wouldn't have me in yours. Kind of you, Miss Gallatin—at least half of it is!"

"It surely is, and it's the half you don't mean!" agreed Miss Gallatin. "I've had no breakfast. Come with me, and after I've seen to my household, and eaten, I'll take you to Mrs. Wallace. Mr. Moore never gets up till noon, Sundays; you won't see him. You call him Rod; known him long?"

"Mercy yes! Forty-eight hours!" Cis's laugh rang out. "You see, Miss Gallatin, I've been out in the world, earning my living since I was old enough to earn it, and that was early, because I was always quick to learn, and I was about twenty when I was fourteen. I've always had boy friends, and I'm not a bit afraid to chum with them. I've some good girl friends, chiefly one, but it's the nice boy who always takes you as you want to be taken. So when I met Rod Moore we fell right together; I was getting green-lonely, and I'm pleased as pleasure to have him like me and see me on my way."

"I see!" Miss Gallatin evidently did see, yet Cis felt that her agreement was noncommittal, involving something that she did not understand. "I like you, too, Cis—did you say Cis?—Adair, and I hope you'll let me help you out, if ever Beaconhite

gets too tight for you; presses on any sore spot."

"Haven't one!" cried Cis. "Thanks, Miss Gallatin; I like you, and I didn't like you one bit till I saw you! I suppose it's all right of you to shove me off, but it isn't sensible, either; I could board in the house with all my boy chums, be the only girl in the offing, and it would go as smooth as silk."

"You may have knocked about the world, as you say you have, Cis Adair, and you may have been twenty at fourteen, but at twenty-two—I'd guess? —you are four in some ways, and your experience is by no means rounded out," said Miss Gallatin oracularly. "Prudence is one of the gifts of the Holy Ghost, my dear, as your catechism taught you, and it's one of His most valuable gifts to attractive young women, left alone in the world."

"I don't remember much catechism, Miss Gallatin," said honest Cis, with her happy laugh. "I learned some of it when I was confirmed, but I'm not much of a Catholic. Of course I'd never be a Protestant," she added hastily, "but my religion doesn't bother me much."

"No; it wasn't founded for that purpose," returned Miss Gallatin. "I wonder how you will be taught to value it? You've got to learn, of course you know that."

Cis looked at her startled, and she was silent for a moment in which her mind went out toward an invisible, infinite track, down which sorrow and suffering, vague, threatening, nameless, molding events, were advancing upon her. Cicely Adair,

fearless, free, strong, independent, would be tamed, bound, caught, crushed, perhaps; signed by the cross, and thus learn its meaning.

Cicely shook off the fear that gripped her, the first fear that in all her life had ever assaulted her deep in her heart. Why had it thus assailed her? What had made her vulnerable to a shaft from the hand of this gaunt woman, past middle age, whose effects were almost grotesque? Cis threw back her radiant head with a short, unmirthful laugh.

"Did they name you Hannah because you were going to be a prophetess, Miss Gallatin?" she asked.

CHAPTER VII

CODES

CICELY had been three weeks in the service of Mr. Wilmer Lucas, four weeks a resident of Beaconhite. Although it lacked three days of being a calendar month the time seemed to her to stretch indefinitely backward into such length, that she had to stop to reckon up how long it actually had been. New experiences were crowding upon her, filling each day with interests so absorbing that the hours sped by, yet left a residue of the effect of more than twice their duration. Cicely was conscious of changes wrought upon herself by these swiftly passing days, changes so far undefined, yet not the less perceptible.

For one thing, her new friendship was proving interesting as none other had ever before interested her. Cicely had had many friends among the boys, and, later, among the young men of her acquaintance, but though they had been "jolly good fun," as she put it, they were not especially interesting. She was easily the dominant one in every case; the chief interest afforded her by these youths was when they temporarily spoiled her theory of perfect comradeship between the sexes, which was devoid of sentiment, by falling in love with her, but this, although it interested her, displeased her.

She invariably swung back into her faith in the possibility of a chum of the opposite sex, but it was annoying to find it so often a theory that failed only in its workings.

In G. Rodney Moore, Cicely had a friend of a totally new sort. He was older than she was, for one thing; he had seen immensely more of the world than she had, for another; he had read more than she had, let alone than any of her previous male friends. Most of all, he had an easy certainty of himself; an amused toleration of her insufficiently grounded opinions; a ready wit; great charm of face, voice and manner, so that, for the first time, Cicely found herself by no means able to hold the ascendency over him with which she had set out dealing with him, which had always, heretofore, been hers in dealing with young men. And, being essentially feminine beneath her boyish ways, she liked the man who dominated, while he admired her. There was much of the excitement of exploration for her in advancing constantly farther into friendship with this man.

Her work was also opening out new vistas to Cicely, daily demanding from her hitherto dormant capacity, skill of hand, but far more quickness of brain, judgment, discretion, all-around intelligence. It was transforming her day by day; although she did not definitely recognize this, yet its effect upon her was to increase the bewilderment of mind with which she was adjusting to new conditions, and to what was to prove the greatest experience of her life.

Cicely had been well educated with reference to practical ends; she and Nan had been superior to the majority of the girls amid whom they were employed; their position in the telephone exchange had been honorable, but not dignified. Now Cicely found herself surrounded by the portentous dignity of the private office of a lawyer who was, at the same time, a bank president, *the* great man of the city.

Solid men, both physically and financially solid, came to consult Mr. Lucas; Cis was gravely saluted by them as they entered and departed; she heard matters discussed which her keen wits soon showed her were of gravest importance in the money market, even in national affairs. All her former days had been lighted by nonsense for which she found opportunity among her companions; fun and nonsense were as the breath of life to Cicely Adair. Now from nine till four there was not only a complete dearth of opportunity to play, but the mere thought of trifling within those solemn, mahogany wainscoted walls, intruded like a profanation.

Cis was expected to be well-dressed, perfectly groomed—but this was natural to her. She was expected to take down any sort of dictation correctly, even to the dictation that she be elegantly correct in manner, reserved, silent, yet devoted, and this dictation was never given her directly but by the assumption that she was all these things. "I'm getting turned into a regular heavy damask, ten dollars a square inch," she told Rodney.

It was true that this outward pressure inevitably

had an inward effect upon the girl, yet nothing could ever quite subdue her native sense of humor, her frank friendliness to all the world.

"Miss Adair," said Mr. Lucas one morning, "I have waited till we were mutually assured of your permanence in this office before initiating you into one of its secrets. You are quite sure that you desire to remain with me?"

"If I suit you, Mr. Lucas," answered Cis. "I'm happy here, but I'm not sure how I'm coming on."

"Satisfactorily, Miss Adair. On my part there is no question of severing the connection. Are you settled upon continuing?" Mr. Lucas looked at Cicely kindly, and she blushed with pleasure.

"Yes, Mr. Lucas," she said. "I'm settled upon settling."

"Ah!" he employer smiled. "Then I am going to ask you to learn the office code."

"Code?" repeated Cis.

"We are often involved in cases which would be disastrous to great interests if they were known to the public. The mails are safe enough, and yet, like all human arrangements, they may sometimes miscarry. Mr. Henderson; our senior clerk, Mr. Saunders; our office in Chicago, and Washington, and myself use a code in relation to these affairs known only to the principals in our Chicago and Washington offices, and the three persons in this office whom I have mentioned. We have decided to have you learn the code, to use it when occasion arises in correspondence with our other two offices. Will you learn this code, Miss Adair, and are you

willing to give your solemn pledge that under no circumstances, to no human being, will you ever disclose it?" Mr. Lucas explained, and waited for Cicely's reply.

She looked at him with widening eyes, her brilliant eyes, dark, of a color that was hard to determine, varying with her mood and as the light struck into them.

"Sounds like a dandy detective story!" Cis said involuntarily. "Yes, I'll learn the code, provided I can learn it, and of course I'll never teach it to anyone else. How do I learn it?"

"It is set down in a sort of chart; you will study it here, of course; the chart must not go out of the office. There is an alphabet connected with it; I am afraid that you will find it troublesome, but I should like you to master it. By the way, my brother has become a Roman Catholic; his family is brought up in that religion; do you happen to be a Romanist?" Mr. Lucas frowned slightly as he asked the question.

"Yes, Mr. Lucas; I'm a Catholic," said Cis. "Why, please?"

"Always running to confession? Asking advice of the priest on every known and unknown point, I suppose! What about the code and its secrecy?" said Mr. Lucas.

Cis laughed outright. "Never asked a priest's advice on anything in all my life; don't go to confession more than twice a year. I don't know what you mean about the code, Mr. Lucas," she said.

"You Romanists are a difficult lot to adjust to,"

said Mr. Lucas. "I strongly object to the principle which is fundamental with you, of laying down your liberty of thought, being subject to a man, taking your opinions from an elevated priest over in Rome and acting on them at the dictation of a lot of half-educated common priests over here. Yet when you don't keep up with the practices of your Church, you are a worthless lot, not often trustworthy. I make an exception of you, Miss Adair; I am satisfied that you are trustworthy, though, apparently, you are what I've heard your co-religionists call 'an indifferent Catholic.' Perhaps you are on your way out of Romanism? It would be a consummation devoutly to be wished. As to the code and its secrecy, what I meant is this: Suppose a priest wanted to get hold of it—they are great people for dipping their oar into other people's waters and muddying them! Suppose a matter concerning politics, or the like, were afoot, and a priest heard of our code, in which we should correspond on such affairs—they are great people for finding out things that no one could ever have imagined their knowing! Suppose this priest, as I was saying, heard of our code and bade you in the confessional reveal it to him, what would you do?"

Again Cis laughed, this time with such heartiness, such manifest enjoyment of an absurdity that Mr. Lucas was already answered by her mirth.

"Why, Mr. Lucas," cried Cis, "you don't know how funny that is, really you don't! I go to confession at Easter, usually at Christmas; it's my

birthday, too. And there's a regular mob; it's all the priests can do to get them all heard. Imagine one of them holding up the line while he talked code to me! How would he know I was in your office, anyway? I wouldn't have to confess that; you only have to confess sins, and it's not a sin to be employed here, Mr. Lucas! Why the poor priests try to get in a word of advice to you, and tell you what your penance is, but they can't always do much more than say about ten words to you! No fear of the code getting talked over! Honest, Mr. Lucas, that's *funny!*"

Mr. Lucas looked as though he were not sure that this was not impertinence on Cis's part, but he decided to accept it for what it actually was, bubbling amusement over a mistake that struck her as absurd.

"Well, I've certainly never confessed," he admitted, "nor ever shall, but I still think, though my supposition is outside your experience so far, that the case is entirely possible. What I want to know is what you would do if such a demand arose?"

"Hold my tongue, of course; what else could I do?" replied Cis with convincing promptitude. "He'd have no right to try to get it out of me, and I'd have no right to tell him."

The code was put into Cicely's hands the next day, her duties so arranged that she should have time for its study. To her chagrin she found it difficult, although her difficulty was usually in learning too fast to be secure of retention, rather than in acquiring her tasks.

The third day of work on the code left her still uncertain of it when she quitted the office at four o'clock to go with Rodney Moore on a part aquatic, part walking expedition up the river in his boat, out through a lovely wooded country to a knowing little restaurant whither Beaconhite people loved to repair to dine. A letter from Nan had come to add to Cis's depression; she set forth with a marked diminution of her usual blitheness, although this expedition with Rodney, in the height of the foliage season in October, had been anticipated by her for two weeks. When Rodney met her at Mrs. Wallace's he instantly marked the shadow on Cis's face; he was quick to note every change in that variable face which was rapidly becoming the goal of his feet, the image hourly before his memory.

"Anything wrong, Holly Berry? You haven't so much of your usual effect of Christmas-all-the-year-around! I thought of that last night, Cis, that you were a sort of perpetual Merry Christmas; your joyousness was probably a birthday gift to you," Rodney said, pulling her hand through his arm with unmistakable satisfaction.

"That's nice, Rod!" Cis cried. "I'd like to be a Merry Christmas sort of thing. No, there's nothing wrong. I'll tell you when we get to the place where you're taking me, or while we're rowing."

"Tell me exactly how there's nothing wrong, Holly? I knew your lights were slightly dimmed. How you show your feelings!" Rod laughed with satisfaction in this proof of their intimacy, that he could instantly discern Cicely's moods.

"Caught me that time! But it's nothing, truly. That old code bothers me; never tackled anything else that wouldn't stay by me over night! The alphabet is ridiculous; little scriggles going one way, crossed by little scriggles going the other way —and they'd all look exactly as well, or as crazy! —reversed! I get to wondering why they don't go the other way about, and then I can't remember which way they *do* go! But of course I'll get them fastened down soon; it's not worth bothering over, Rory, my pal." Cis beamed on Rodney, liking his sympathy.

"Rory?" queried Rodney.

"Sure-ly! Rory O'Moore, don't you know? That's really your name; it came to me this morning while I was getting ready to go out!" Cis laughed softly.

"Oh, by jiminy, Cis, I don't care what you call me if you'll think of me so frequently. It means I'm getting on the inside!" Rodney's delight was unmistakable. "Are you Kathleen bawn?"

Cis shook her head. "Why?" she asked, then blushed fiercely as the words of the old song came to her: "Rory O'Moore courted Kathleen bawn."

Before she was called upon to speak, just as Rodney murmured:

"Rory O'Moore courted Kathleen bawn:
He was bold as the day, she as fair as the morn,"

an extraordinarily handsome girl, sumptuously dressed, beyond the strict propriety of a walking

costume, swung around the corner which they were about to cross and almost ran into Cicely and Rodney.

"Why, Gertrude—Miss Davenport!" exclaimed Rodney.

"Oh, good evening, Mr. Moore; I beg your pardon." The handsome girl's glance swept Cis from head to foot. "Glad I wore my pongee," thought Cis, reflecting with satisfaction on the lines of her tailor-made skirt and gown, its fine linen collar and cuffs with their exquisite hand-wrought scallop and corners.

"Awfully glad to meet you, Miss Davenport," Rodney continued. "I've wanted you to meet Miss Adair. Please waive convention, and let a man give you two girls a street introduction. Miss Davenport, this is Miss Cicely Adair, a recent and great acquisition to Beaconhite. Cicely, this is our city's pride, which is not at all the same thing as civic pride."

Rodney knew that he was speaking nervously, and that his would-be cleverness halted at its intention.

Gertrude Davenport nodded, a crisp nod, her head held sidewise, an amused smile on her lips.

"Delighted to waive ceremony, of course. Hope you like Beaconhite, Miss Dare. We may meet again; hope so. I'm not going your way, and am in a hurry. Good evening, Mr. Moore, I began to think you were no more; glad to see you are still in town, alive, you know. I've been awfully occupied lately, but I'll receive you if you wish to come

to the house where you heretofore spent practically *all* your time; dad's rather grateful for one less to disturb him! He says he's glad he has only *one* daughter!" Gertrude Davenport laughed, but her large, full eyes flashed fire.

"He couldn't hope to have two like Gertrude; his other one, if she'd been born, would have had to wait till Gertrude was out of the way to be visible. Thanks, Miss Davenport; I've been waiting my chance, but I'll get it soon, and you'll see me disturbing the pater!" Rodney assured her, with an unfortunate note of condolence in his voice.

"Thanks; so good of you! Good-bye!" Again Gertrude nodded crisply, sidewise, without more notice of Cis than another swift, comprehensive glance. Then she went rapidly on in her original direction.

Rodney laughed and tucked Cis's hand into his arm. He had been weighing in his mind the overwhelming attraction which Cis possessed for him, against the great advantages which a marriage with Gertrude Davenport included: Wealth, social position, solid business connections, through her father; not least a wife so handsome that wherever he appeared with her all the other men would turn to look at her, envying him. But now that Gertrude, in all her splendor of face and form and raiment had suddenly appeared beside Cis, Cis's irregular, winsome face, her merry kindliness, her clear-eyed purity of heart, mind and purpose so overtopped all Gertrude's advantages, that he knew at once that there could be no more debate in his

mind as to which girl he wanted to marry. Debate! Why, what was gold beside Cicely's copper hair? What social position beside such a comrade? What regular beauty beside Cis's charm? As to money, he could earn all that he needed. Rodney knew that his mind was made up for him by the gravity weight of Cicely Adair, drawing him; to do him justice he was suddenly glowing with an unworldly and genuine love for the girl, resolved to win her with such desire that there was no question of sacrifice for that end.

"Miss Davenport doesn't like red hair, perhaps?" hinted Cis demurely.

"Perhaps not, Holly. Perhaps she likes to do her own liking, solo. But if you ask me, I don't think it matters to the value of one of those red hairs, what Miss Davenport doesn't like, nor—which is far more important—what she does like," Rodney said.

Cis raised her eyebrows; she had not missed symptoms, and she was accurate in their diagnosis.

"It's a world of changes, Rory O'Moore," she said. "A wise girl accepts them, and, if she's still wiser, she looks for the next change."

"You young sinner! Do you mean—"

"Sinners aren't prophets, Rod; never mind what I mean," Cis interrupted him.

Rodney pressed her hand in the crook of his elbow; they both laughed and went on their way rejoicing, Rodney exuberantly light-hearted, as if he had just fallen into a fortune, or had escaped a threatening danger.

Arrived at their ultimate destination, after a pleasant row up the river, Rodney inducted Cicely to the pretty glade of which he had told her, and placed her comfortably upon a low knoll. The blaze of autumn-tinted maples, oaks and sumacs was all around them, so beautiful that Cis caught her breath, then laughed to cover the emotion which dimmed her eyes.

"I wonder how it can be so much more beautiful than we can take in!" she said. "It gives me no chance at all, though; makes even my hair look drab!"

"Drab! I'd say so!" agreed Rodney derisively. "Cis-Holly, how about that code? I'll help you with it, if you like; I'm a bird at things of that sort."

"Can't be done, Rod! I'm under the solemnest, swearingest vow to keep that to myself. I'll master it by to-morrow; I'm sure it will jump into my brain suddenly when it gets ready," Cis answered, thanking him with a smile.

"Something else is shading you," Rodney reminded her. "Said you'd tell me here."

"It's nothing to shade me, really; I ought to be glad: it's Nan," Cis said slowly.

"Nan? Anything wrong with her?" Rodney asked; he knew Nan by repute.

"No. But there is a youth, quite a nice youth, who has been tagging on after her for some time, and I've noticed that he was overhauling her, creeping right up on her. And she has written me that he has asked her to marry him, and she has

told him that she would give him his answer in a week; she wants me to tell her which answer to give," Cis spoke disconsolately.

"Must be a great girl if she has to ask another girl whether she wants to marry a man or not!" exclaimed Rodney. "He'd be tickled pink if he knew it, probably! What shall you bid her say?"

"Oh, as to that, she knows what she is going to say; that's only a natural balking, natural to Nan, anyway!" Cis smiled. "I'll tell her to say yes. She's fond of him, and he truly is all right; ever so much better than most fellows."

"What do you know about 'most fellows,' Holly? Then, if it's all right, why do you look downcast over it?" Rodney naturally inquired.

"Silliness," responded Cis promptly. "But I'm fond of Nannie; no girl likes to see her best friend marry. It isn't grudging her happiness, it's, it's, —I don't know what it is, but it hurts."

"Well, heaven knows, marriage is a bad thing to go into in half the cases, and at least half of the other half are dragging, defeating, miserable endurance. It isn't the girl that needs all the pity and anxiety; believe me, marriage is rough on a man, too. The only comfort is that it's easy enough to slough it off; you can usually get a divorce, luckily!" Rodney spoke so bitterly that Cis stared at him.

"Is marriage so awful?" she asked. "It isn't because I ever thought that it was such a fearful risk, that I'm sorry about Nan; it separates us more than my coming to Beaconhite does. But divorce

is horrible, at least Nan would never think of it; she's a devout Catholic, and so is Joe Hamilton, whom she'll marry. Have you known marriages that turned out so bad as you say?"

"Rather!" Rodney's brevity made his answer more emphatic, and Cis wondered at the grim look upon his face. "Poor Rod, it must have been his mother! I've thought that he didn't want to talk of her," she told herself. Then, to banish that grimness, she jumped up and cried: "Let's explore a little, Rod; then we must start back; already it gets dark early, and I'm going to be hungry in six and a half minutes, precisely!"

"You can't have anything to eat for fifteen minutes!" Rodney laughed, throwing off seriousness and triumphing in Cis's surprise that food were within a quarter of an hour's accessibility. "Did you observe that camera, as you thought it, that black case? It holds a light supper, my ruddy Holly, to preserve your life till a solid one is to be had. Now tell me I'm careless of your comfort, am mean, and not a good provider!"

"Never shall I tell you that, Rory O'Moore! I never knew anyone so thoughtful. It's fun to take a snack out here, but, please, I don't want to stay late, Rod!" Cis said.

"Will you go out on Sunday for the whole day? Start early? I'll get up at half past six; we'll be off before eight—and I can't give a stronger proof of how I rate the privilege of a day with you in the autumn glories!" Rodney smiled, yet meant it.

"I couldn't start before—let's see! Eight, nine

—about quarter to ten, Rod. I'd love to go, though," Cis answered.

"Too late; the train we'd take leaves at 8:20. Why can't you get off as early as I can? You rise early Sundays, you told me; I don't." Rodney looked vexed.

"Well, there's Mass," said Cis. "I always go at eight; it's the first one."

"Mass!" Rodney fairly shouted the word. "Good heavens, *Mass!* I never once suspected you of that! Are you a holy Roman?"

"Not holy; just a Roman," Cis corrected him. "Neither did I suspect you of prejudices, of minding what I was. I used to miss Mass once in a while, but I knew better, and when I came away I promised Nan I'd go every Sunday, unless I positively could not go. I don't bother much with religion, but I keep inside the Church, sort of on the last step, in the vestibule!"

"Cut it out, Cicely!" cried Rodney. "Drop the thing. You aren't the girl to let stuff that no one knows a thing about get hold of you. It's silly to hang on to a chimera, and it's dishonest, cowardly to be afraid to chuck it. Make a break right here, Cis, and come with me early next Sunday morning. I used to learn catechism myself; I've learned now that no one has any right to try to teach it. Chuck that nonsense, brave, free, honest Cis; believe me, you'd better! And it only means being honest with yourself; if you believed in it, you'd never hang around that last step of yours."

Cicely looked at him gravely, with troubled eyes. Then she said slowly:

"I've often thought exactly what you say, Rod; I'm afraid I'm not honest. Then again I think I am honest in trying to keep hold. You know there's something in the Gospel about there being virtue in the hem of the garment; I don't like to drop the wee edge I'm holding. It's something like the code, you know, Rodney dear; I can't learn it easily, but I'd never think of giving it away —don't you see?"

"Cis, Cis, Cis, *drop* it! It's a danger; it's your enemy, it's my enemy! That horrible system will wreck your life! Cis, for my sake, in pity say you'll come with me on Sunday, and cut out the Mass! Cis, it's a test, Cis; you *must* come! Cis, Cis, for my sake?" Rodney spoke quite wildly, crushing her hands in his.

Cis looked at him, frightened, and then a great tenderness flooded her face, a look that it had never worn before.

"All that isn't true, Rod; it is sheer nonsense, but one Sunday can't matter. I'll go with you, if you care so much to have me," she said gently. Then as if a new fear came upon her, she added: "Dear old pal of mine!" hiding behind a phrase.

CHAPTER VIII

CABLE STRANDS

THAT night Cis took the pins out of her hair and let it fall around her, like a screen of molten metal which miraculously could envelop and not sere her. It shone above her white petticoat and over her bare arms and shoulders so resplendent that it was a pity that there was none to see it, though Cis felt no such regret. She did not consciously see herself as she stood before her mirror, letting down her Brünhilde-like tresses; her mind was filled with other thoughts, and she turned from the glass to switch off the electric light the better to follow out these thoughts and their conclusions.

She went over to the window and seated herself in a low chair, her right foot boyishly resting on her left knee that she might easily remove its shoe, but having removed it she absent-mindedly let it drop on the floor and stroked her silk-stockinged instep, forgetful that normally one takes off its mate when one shoe has been removed.

Cis was reliving her outing with Rodney that afternoon; it gave her food for new and serious thought. Rodney had definite and adverse views in regard to religion from her views and, apparently, he was especially adverse to hers, to the Old

Faith. This surprised her. She had thought of him as indifferent, with an indifference not greatly unlike her own, the difference being that she was indifferent within her faith, while he was indifferent outside of any faith; the difference between two persons without an appetite, one seated at a table, the other resting in an ante-room. Yet this was an exaggeration of the situation as she had previously conceived it. Cis meant to keep her Faith, somewhat as one keeps a valuable piece of lace, not letting it get lost, but not often getting it out of its storage drawer. Rod, however, had pleaded with her, speaking with impassioned earnestness, not to adhere to the Church, to cast it off as a shackle. She had been amazed to find that he cared, violently desired to get her to drop out of her Church. Why did he? What difference could it make to him that she held to it, provided that it did not get in the way of their friendship? If she bothered him with it, tried to convince him of its truth, let it come between them in any way, behaved about it as Nan would, for instance, Rod might justly consider it a nuisance, but as it was, why did he mind? He had said that he had once learned catechism. What catechism? Episcopalian? Cis thought that Lutherans, and Presbyterians also, had a catechism, but she was not conversant with the ways of the Protestant sects. It could not have been the Catholic catechism? In that case Rod himself had once been to Mass, had probably been instructed and received the Sacraments as she had. But this was not likely; Cis

did not believe that G. Rodney Moore had ever been within the Church. Perhaps poor Cis found it hard to believe that anyone who had ever been actually within her could ever be actually outside of her.

She had promised Rod to go with him out into the country early on Sunday morning, to do which she would omit Mass. A mortal sin? That was what she had been taught, but she had missed Mass before, for less cause. Poor Rod! He had so eagerly begged her to do this for him! He showed such intense feeling about it; it seemed to matter to him beyond the intrinsic importance of taking that special train, going to that particular place on this coming Sunday. Again: why? But how could it be a mortal sin to gratify the dear fellow? She was not going to give up the Church, of course, but it did go rather far in some things, notably in the matter of turning meat-eating on forbidden days, and Mass-omission on commanded days into a mortal sin. She intended to remain a Catholic, but it could hardly be that missing Mass deliberately on a Sunday would shut one out of heaven if she died that night unshriven, uncontrite. She hated to break her promise to Nan for the first time; she would write Nan in the morning and tell her that she should not be at Mass on Sunday, but not to mind; she would go other Sundays. It was fair to let Nan know that she was breaking her promise: letting her know seemed to lessen the breach of faith with nice Nannie. She must also hasten to advise her to marry Joe Hamilton. Funny little

Nannie! As though she would not marry him anyway! Nan was fond of him, Cis was sure of that, fond enough of him to predict the marriage happy, but Cis thought that she might have been equally fond of another nice boy; Joe was a nice boy. It was all right for Nannie; Cis recognized in her the woman whose children would be the absorbing devotion of her life, her husband would be sure to drift pleasantly into second place. It was all right for Nan, but it would not do for Cis! If ever she married it would be a man whose presence blinded her to all other creatures; whose life and death included her own; she would worship him, live for him, breathe in him, count nothing costly that contributed to his welfare, even to his pleasure. She would be good to her children, love them, look after them to the best of her ability, but—weigh them in the scale with her husband? Preposterous! She would be first of all what Eve was to Adam, his mate superaboundingly. Why had that handsome, bad-tempered Davenport girl acted as she had acted? She wanted Rod. Why did she? Cis felt a fierce sort of fury toward her, and clutched Rod in her thoughts; she gloated over him and over the thought that the Davenport girl could not take him from her. She had never before been dominated for even an instant by an unreasoning, overpowering hatred for a person, as if she would cut her down as she stood, if she moved hand or foot upon her preserves. *Her* preserves! What did it mean? Jealous? But what did that mean?

Of all things, what did *that* mean? She, free, frank, comradely Cis Adair, whom all the boys had liked, who had liked them all in return, whose pulses had never quickened at the thought or sight of any one of them, much less her heart contracted as hers did now in thinking of this.

Cis was not stupid; she knew what it meant. With a great wave of terror, of resistance, of joy, of triumph, of profound humility, she laid her head down on her bare white arms, folded on the window sill, and her splendid red hair fell over her as the outward symbol of the royal garment which she had donned, the vestment of her womanhood. For Cicely knew that she had come into the kingdom of her own self, her life's crisis. Never again should she be the old careless, free, light-hearted Cis. A loss, perhaps, but at what a gain! She lifted her face, wet as the light of the street electricity fell upon it, and pushed back her masses of red gold hair from her hot cheeks.

"Miss Mass for him! Yes, oh, yes! I'd lose my soul for him, if it would make him happy!" she cried aloud, rising to her full height and stretching her arms upward with a royal gesture, as though she at once renounced and received.

Cis arose early the next morning to carry out her intention to write to Nan. She wrote rapidly, at gossipy length, on a writing case resting on her knee, seated at the window where she had sat long on the night before.

She told Nan all about events in the office; her struggles with the code; about women boarding at

Mrs. Wallace's, whose idiosyncrasies she touched off to the life, with merry ridicule which was keen, yet not unkind. Only at the end of the letter she turned serious. "Nannie, dear," she wrote, "of course I say marry Joe, though I'm mean enough to be a little sorry to let you marry anyone. If you love him, that is all. You must love him, or you would not consider it at all. He is a lucky fellow, but he is all right himself. You have my blessing. It is everything to love someone with all your heart, but if he loves you, too—Oh, Nannie, you are in luck, my dear! Though I should think a great, tearing love would always be returned; simply melt the other one. I'd never hesitate over *anything* if I loved a man—you silly little thing! I'll see you some day, before you're married, I hope. By the way, speaking of nuptial Masses, I'm going to cut church next Sunday; wanted to tell you I'm breaking my promise this once. I've got a fine pal here—I told you about him—he wants me to do something; go off too early Sunday morning to get in Mass, too, and he wants it so badly that it's right to give him the happiness. I'd do more than that to make him happy. I don't suppose it really is a damning sin to miss Mass, but I guess I'd go to hell, if it would make things easier for him. So now you can see how I feel about this pal o' mine! There was one of him made, and then the mold was broken! I'm happy, but I'm not at all sure he'd go as far as purgatory for me. Your loving Cis."

Cis read her letter over with her cheeks aflame, her eyes wet, her breath short.

"Well, she won't show the letter, that's one thing sure, and I never could see why it is anything to be ashamed of that you love someone like mad! You can't begin to love a man the instant he asks you to! Nan will say: 'She's still honest Cis, that's one sure thing!' Poor little mouse; she'll worry her head off; probably think he's a Jew with a Calvinistic mother, or something!"

The hours that must pass before that early train started from Beaconhite on Sunday morning sped fast for Cis, in spite of her eagerness for the time to come. The feeble undercurrent of regret for her choice of man instead of God, for her broken promise to Nan, she stifled; indeed it hardly needed her attention, so eager was she now for a whole day with Rodney, so sure that he was going to take her into pleasant and beautiful places, show her how to grow ever happier with him.

She arose much earlier than was necessary, dressed carefully in the golden brown tailored suit, with its accompanying smart, small hat of golden brown beaver, a bright wing of henna-orange laid on its brim its sole trimming, the new suit which was her pride and which Rod had said made her look "like the twin sister of Phoebus Apollo."

Cis went out of the house and ate a hasty breakfast at a restaurant because she was leaving before Mrs. Wallace's regular breakfast hour. She hurried so fast that she had considerable spare time

on her hands and walked to the station to fill it in; Rod had asked her to meet him there because there was risk of missing their train if he came to fetch her from her boarding place.

Cis was surprised to see that there was a look of relief, as well as great joy on his face when she appeared; he was already waiting for her.

"Ah, my Autumn Maiden!" he cried, seizing her hand tightly. "I don't know why, because you're a girl of your word, but somehow I was afraid you'd get cold feet at the last minute and not turn up! Awful glad you didn't, Holly! You're a Maple Tree Symphony in that rig! My, but you're stunning, Holly!"

"Nonsense, Rod! As though I didn't know I wasn't pretty!" cried Cis, her whole face spilling over rapture.

"Pretty? Perhaps not; I said stunning! You don't give a fellow time to consider whether you're pretty or not," rejoined Rodney. "You're mighty easy to look at! No, you're not, by jiminy! It's hard afterward, anyway!"

"If you talk stuff to me, Rory O'Moore, I'll turn around and go home," cried Cis.

"Then I won't, not till the train gets to pulling fast! Had anything to eat? It's a beastly time to ask you to turn out, but I'm not regulating this railroad!" Rodney said.

"Had my breakfast outside, not to bother Mrs. Wallace," Cis told him. "Ate oodles."

"Doubt it. Never can trust a girl to feed herself when she's got anything better to do," Rod

corrected her. "I've provender in that basket you see at my feet; some pretty nifty sandwiches, fruit, candy, iced coffee, in a cold thermos. It will hold you alive till we get dinner. We'll have one dinner, that I promise you! Ever hear of Pioneer Falls? They're seventy miles from here, through as pretty a country as you'd ask for, and the falls are as good as they're advertised to be. But the main consideration is that there's a hotel there which sets up the best dinner I ever ate anywhere, and let me tell you I've knocked around some, and I'm a connoozer of food! So don't you worry, Holly, that you'll wither and fade away in my hands!"

"Not a worry, Rod! I'm not afraid of what will happen to me in your hands," Cis assured him with a gay little laugh, but her eyes expressed something remote from laughter.

"By all that's truthful, Cicely, if anything unhappy, or unfortunate ever came to you at my hands it would be because you would not let my hands work freely for your good," Rodney said, with such emphasis that Cis looked startled, but he immediately added: "Our train's made up, Holly: Let's get our places; better than standing here."

He led her through the gates, his tickets ready in hand; selected seats on the shaded side, luckily the one which gave the better view of the country which they were to traverse; arranged her coat on a hook; had the porter bring a footstool to lay before her chair; settled himself; swung his own chair

full in front of hers and sank back to gaze at her with eyes which needed no tongue to interpret them.

Cis knew that the intimacy of this early journey, with all the world excluded from their consciousness, with its inevitable suggestion of other journeys, always together, especially of one other journey which this almost might be, so fast, so blissfully her heart was beating, Cis knew that it was to Rodney, as to herself, a new rapture, poignant, almost unbearably delicious in its present, and in its future promise. She knew as well as if he had spoken, that Rodney Moore loved her and intended to tell her so; to ask her to go with him on all his ways till death.

She realized that this day was to be filled to overflowing with that tremulous, delicate bliss which preludes those unspoken words, when both man and woman know that they are to be spoken and how they will be answered, a bliss that almost surpasses the joy of full possession, as anticipation always must surpass fulfilment, the mystery of dawn be lovelier than the full noontide.

"Shall we go to Niagara instead, Holly?" asked Rodney, bending toward her.

"No, indeed! I would rather see Pioneer Falls! Niagara is too big," Cis said quickly, catching the significance of his allusion to the conventional bridal-tour point, resolved to keep this day under the glamor of what was to follow it, not to let him speak yet. "Besides, I couldn't get to the office at nine-thirty from Niagara! Rod, I haven't seen

you to tell you! The code straightened out for me yesterday, just as I knew it would, suddenly, sometime! I've got the horrid thing so it will eat out of my hand!"

"Good for you! You're a great one, Holly dear!" Rodney answered, settling back into his chair, following her lead.

The train took them through beautiful scenes of farmland, valleys and hills, beside a peaceful river, through small forests, everything, everywhere glowing with October colors, "like Cis," as Rodney said. Neither Rodney nor Cis were inclined to talk; it was too beautiful for comment, too sacred for small talk, this lovely setting of their romance, also rapidly nearing its destination.

Pioneer Falls was the name of the station. Rodney picked up his basket and preceded Cis to a small motor car, billeted: "For hire," which took them to the falls.

Here they climbed steep paths, and descended long, narrow steps, to see the falls from above and below, hushed by the wild and solemn beauty of their setting, chilled by the evaporation of their heavy waters, the dense shade of their surrounding pines and hemlocks.

"It's not half-bad to get into a dining room after all that, is it, Holly?" asked Rodney when they had seated themselves at a small table tête-à-tête, and the waiter had withdrawn, after sending Cis's blood to her hair by asking whether "Madame would take lettuce, endive, or salade Romaine?"

"It's not the smallest fraction bad, Rod," re-

plied Cis, grateful to him for not taking advantage of the waiter's mistake. "And I'm ravenous in spite of your lunch!"

Over the demi-tasse at the end of dinner Rodney lighted a cigarette and smoked silently, scrutinizing Cis.

"What?" she asked him, looking up to catch his gaze.

"I was wondering if you didn't think that it had been better, wiser, more natural, after all, to come off with me, when we like so much to be together, without going to church? Don't you honestly think, little Holly-Cis, that we hallow this day?" he promptly answered.

"Well, Rod, I've been perfectly happy," Cis answered. "I suppose, maybe, once in a way—" She stopped. "Funny you brought that up," she went on. "I've been thinking ever since that day of what you said. What catechism was it, Rod, that you studied? What are you?"

"The penny catechism, my dear; Third Plenary Council of Baltimore, I believe they said it was. Who made you, et cetera," replied Rodney.

"Catholic? Are you a Catholic?" cried Cis.

"Now, Holly, do I look it, or act it?" demanded Rodney. "No, my dear; I'm nothing, but they did start me on the same catechism you had; my people are all Catholics."

"Left the Church?" Cis looked startled.

"You funny child! When you don't care tuppence about it!" Rodney laughed at her.

"I dropped it; that's better said. I don't be-

lieve in it. They tried to control me in matters of my personal rights as a man. They would interfere with me now if they could. They will with you, if you let 'em. They'll ruin your life, my Cicely. All wrong, all wrong! I want you to drop it, too. Cicely, believe me, it will warp you, destroy your God-given instincts and desires; ruin your life, Cis! I am free now to do as seems good to me; I want you to be free with me. I believe there's a God, though I never heard anyone prove it who tried to, but I believe it. You keep your faith in Him, if you want to, but drop this Church business, with its laws. Cicely, I am afraid, *afraid*, I tell you, to think of your sticking blindly to all that! Let it go. You needn't abjure it, do anything formal, but let it go. Go around to lectures, Sundays, or, what's better, come with me out into clean, still places and we'll read the poets and philosophers, and have music—I play the violin fairly well, Holly, dear; you haven't heard me—yet! Drop it, Cis, for both our sakes, I beg of you! This is one of the things I brought you here to-day to say. I've studied; I know the thing from top to bottom. Nonsense!"

"Why do you care so much, Rod? You look half wild when you speak of it. Why do you care? What difference would it make to you if I kept on in my half-way Catholicity?" Cis asked more puzzled than impressed by his plea.

"Why do I care?" Rodney burst out, then checked himself. "Oh, Cicely, because it separates us! Child, you don't know; I do! As sure as the

sun rises and sets it will break your heart and plunge me into wretchedness and despair if you continue, even in your half-way, as you call it. There is no half-way. Either you are a Roman Catholic, or you're not. You may be a cold one, or a hot one, but one you are, unless you drop it wholly. It is a barrier between us."

"Rod, what foolishness!" cried Cis. "We shall be—friends—whether I'm in or out of the Church. Am I narrow-minded; are you? And if I were good you might come back!"

"Not I! Never!" cried Rodney. "Cis, my Holly, my bright, hope-giving, joy-giving Christmas Holly, you've done for me what I never thought could be done! I was wretched, and you have healed me. Will you plunge me down again?"

"No, Rod; I couldn't do that," Cis said simply, softly. "I don't see how being a Catholic could do that, but if it did—"

"You'd give it up?" Rodney eagerly interrupted her.

"I don't say that," Cis spoke with slow consideration, weighing her words. "I don't see how I'd ever be able—But I couldn't hurt you either, Rod! Can't it just go on? I'm not one bit pious; I don't see how it could bother you if I went to Mass Sundays, and once in a long while to confession?"

Rodney looked at her long without speaking. "It's up to me, I see," he said at last, and Cis accepted what seemed to be a concession to her, although she had no conception of its terms.

And then there happened one of those trifling

things which so often sway human decisions and actions. Two shabby, dirty little Italians had been looking in at the door, unnoticed by Rodney and Cis. Now there came the landlord, blustering, to chase them away with harsh words, and the children turned to go, the little girl bursting into frightened tears, the boy muttering something, helplessly fierce.

Instantly Rodney sprang up and hurried to the door.

"Here, come back here! Wait!" he cried.

He turned to the landlord. "What harm were the little scraps doing? They may be hungry. Get them a half a pie apiece, and a lot of cake, and nuts, chestnuts! They'd be sure to like chestnuts! And coffee, big cups, plenty of milk and sugar, and some oranges, and put it on my bill," he ordered.

"I won't have dirty children in here," cried the landlord.

"Dirty! Dirty! Weren't you ever dirty when you were a small boy? But who asked you to have them in here? There's room outside on the grass. Good gracious, you have enough left over every meal to feed half a dozen kids. Set 'em up on me!" Rodney ordered impatiently, and soon he and Cis had the satisfaction of seeing each child blissfully struggling to circumvent the contents of the juicy half of an apple pie from attaining its release, backward from the crust, as it was deeply bitten.

It was a small thing, yet it set Cicely's heart

glowing with tender, admiring love for this big-hearted, gallant Rodney, who flew to the rescue of the helpless, and gave food and happiness to God's little ones. Illogically, it seemed to prove Rod right in saying that the Church and fidelity to it did not matter. Had he not left it, and yet he shared with beggars, like a modern version of St. Martin of Tours?

"You are great, Rod!" Cis said proudly as she stood with her eyes on the children outside the window, and Rod, helping her on with her coat, watched them also, over her shoulder.

He had an uncanny way of reading her thoughts. Now he whispered into her ear, though there was no one near to hear:

"You may give up the practices of religion, yet not give up true religion, my Holly! I'm not all bad, though I don't confess my sins!"

CHAPTER IX

ATALANTA'S PAUSE

"THE only defect in this sort of a day is that it has to end so early. It makes things seem thin and flat to pick up and start back on a train leaving a few minutes past three," grumbled Rodney, putting Cis into her car chair and bestowing himself opposite to her, as they had come up to Pioneer Falls.

"Oh, no, it doesn't!" Cis contradicted him happily. "Don't be greedy, Rory! Greedy and ungrateful. Think what a beautiful day, and—four, six, ten—it will be more than ten hours long by the time we get home!"

"Ungrateful I'm not; but greedy? Well, why shouldn't I be? Hungry people are greedy, especially for the kind of food that best nourishes them. Philosophy is all very well, but it's not always a satisfactory symptom! Don't you be too easily satisfied, Miss Holly Adair! One day couldn't satisfy me; it whets my appetite!" Rodney's eyes were literally devouring, his voice sharp.

"Oh, well, Rod!" Cis said softly. "I'm not exactly easy-going. One day at a time! They sing a silly hymn at church, all about not praying for anything, not even to be good, except 'just for to-

day,' when of course we're saying all the time: 'Now, and at the hour of our death,' and we're made to pray for final perseverance! But 'just for to-day' comes in all right now; this is our day, and a pretty nice one! I've been happy all day long, and we're still happy, with two hours and a half ahead, and I love to ride on the train. A whole day happy is a big thing!"

"Cis, you speak as if you were afraid! There are years of happy days ahead, my girl! When I first knew you, Holly dear, I thought I'd never seen a creature who had passed the twenty-first birthday, who was so absolutely without a thought of the morrow as you were." Rodney looked at Cis questioningly.

"Ah! When you first knew me!" Cis breathed the words so softly that Rodney leaned forward to catch them. "I'm changing fast, Rod; I have changed; I'm getting tamed. Happiness scares you when you know you're happy. Before I came here I was happy, but it was the way kids are happy. I didn't know I was happy; just went along as if I was a boy, whistling. Now—I think about it." Cis pulled herself up short, then she added: "They tell you that life isn't particularly happy when you get well into it, that happiness is not meant to last. I suppose what everybody says is true; how can I help being afraid? But it's a queer thing: I'm happier when I'm afraid than I was when I wasn't afraid one bit!"

Rodney smiled on her, well-content with her unconscious revelations, or was it that Cis was so

trusting, so honest that she was conscious of revealing, yet did not mind it?

"Do you believe that you will not be happy, Holly dear? That *we* shall not be happy? Do you believe all these croakers who try to make you think life is a dismal thing, and all true happiness is beyond the grave? That's religion's talk! Don't you heed it. Of course no clock strikes twelve every hour, but you'll see what bliss life holds, and that we'll keep tight grasp on it, provided you steer straight. Why, little kid Cicely, you've no more notion of what bliss is ahead of you than a small brown bunny out in those woods yonder! Believe me, you glowing, gorgeous-tinted Holly, you will laugh at your fears when you get over the drunkenness of the joy you're going to have!" Rodney smiled at Cis with flashing eyes.

Cis smiled back at him, her breath a little short, but her candid eyes looked into his unafraid. Whatever Cis feared or dreaded, it was nothing within the compass of Rodney's control; to him she trusted herself completely.

She leaned back in her chair, her hat in her lap, luxuriously rumpling her hair by rolling her head slightly on the chair's plush back. Her face grew grave and sweet as her thoughts travelled onward from Rodney's promise of lasting happiness to her own conviction that sorrow must come. It did not matter greatly as long as fundamentals held. Rodney's "*we*" destroyed fear. Womanlike, she felt that sorrow that was shared would in itself hold a sweeter joy than happiness; that if she could

lighten a burden for Rod there would be no weight in the heaviest burden upon herself. The prescience of the woman showed Cis the profound meaning of a true marriage; not, first in importance, to be happy together, but to learn to be happy in being unhappy together.

"Cis, I did not know that you could look like that!" cried Rodney suddenly. They had been silent for a little space, and he was watching Cis's changing expression with awe and wonder, unable to follow her mental processes, yet guessing their course.

"You look at me so strangely, yet as if you hardly saw me."

"I see you, Rod, but farther than in that Pullman chair. How did I look at you?" Cis asked.

"As if I were a baby, or a bird with a broken wing; I know you'd look like that at either of those things!" Rodney answered slowly.

"I was thinking," she said simply. "Then, afterward, I was thinking how dear and good you were to those forlorn children, and how fine it was to be good like that, yet strong and brave, and what a lovely day you'd made for me, too!"

"Sweet Cicely! I don't believe that you've the least suspicion of your own value!" Rodney cried, sincerely moved by her humility, which was less humility than the lack of all self-seeing.

He lay back, still watching her, while she looked dreamily out of the window at the flaming trees rushing past them in units of beauty, massed into a splendid whole. He was thinking: "She has

been utterly content and happy the livelong day! She will soon get around to thinking that the day was complete, and completely innocent, without Mass; I'll have no trouble turning her away and holding her fast!"

Rodney had a strong reason for wanting to get Cicely to drop her Church, as he had done; he was delighted to believe that there would be no obstacle before him there. But Rodney was wrong in thinking that Cicely was tending toward easy weaning from it. She was remembering that she had deliberately stayed away from Mass that morning in order to gratify Rodney; she was determining that she would not do so again. Hitherto she had not felt any more longing for God than had one of His young four-footed creatures; she had played in His sight, innocently as to the actions condemned by man, careless of His service. She had made her First Communion with awe and faith to a degree, but without the enkindling of her soul. It did not mean much to her, although she would have answered correctly any question in the catechism relating to the two sacraments for which she had then been prepared. She had no mother, no one to whom her approach to her God mattered vitally, as it must to a mother whose twofold love for her God and her child breathlessly watches their compounding. Cis had gone on through her brief years to the present, sound in mind and body, wholesome and true, but with not much more spirituality than a kitten. Now she began to grope for God, afar, dimly; she wanted to find Him to

give Him to Rodney. For Rodney she wanted the best. Like Portia, she began to reach out after greater values with which to deck herself that she might stand high in his regard, be fit thus to stand. And she took her first, actually seeking steps toward God to find Him, the one, all-embracing God in order to give Him to Rodney. Rod had drifted away; he was not like her; he had deliberately turned from his Church. Well, she had heard of a woman, a saint—her name was something that sounded like Money—who had brought her son into heaven. Surely! St. Augustine, it was, and his mother, Monica! She, Cis Adair, was by no means a saint, but she might do that, too, if Rodney loved her well enough. And he did love her! How he looked at her, with eyes that made her own drop and her cheeks flush, and then with such gentle tenderness that she could weep. He was not going to tell her to-day that he loved her; she was glad of that; she would like to hold off that revelation in spoken words a little longer. It was so beautiful to look up and surprise its revelation in his handsome, dear face, and pretend to herself that she had not been sure that she should see it there! She was a bad girl to have indulged him by omitting Mass that day, yet how happy it had made him, and how happy it made her to make him happy! Perhaps it was not so bad, just this one time! After this she would keep to Mass faithfully and coax Rodney there with her. Curious that the Beaconhite church where she went, the one nearest to her boarding place, had no Sun-

day Mass before eight! She thought there were always earlier Masses. It was partly the fault of St. Francis Xavier's church that she missed Mass to-day; if there had been one at six she could have heard it before she took the train. She did not push herself to state in her thoughts whether she was entirely sure that she should have done so.

"You have not spoken for a half hour, Holly!" Rodney rebuked Cis at last. "What are you thinking about? We're getting into Beaconhite, and you're cheating me!"

"Thinking—thinking—Oh, about something like the suffrage; woman's influence!" cried Cis arousing, puzzled at first how to answer, then answering with laughter in her eyes, her one dimple playing just beyond the deep, sweet corner of her lips.

"Great trick not to be precisely a pretty girl, yet look so much better than pretty ones, Holly!" cried Rodney involuntarily, remembering Gertrude Davenport and her tiresome perfection of beauty.

"Let's walk to the house, Rod," suggested Cis, when they came out of the station into Beaconhite's main street.

"Let's walk to the restaurant first of all!" Rodney amended her proposal. "I've no notion of being conveyed to the hospital on an ambulance call, perishing in the street from inanition!"

Accordingly they walked briskly toward the small hotel in a cross street, several blocks from the station, where, Rodney affirmed, "there was the most decent chef in Beaconhite."

They came upon a block where there had been

a fire; cordons were stretched across the sidewalk, into the road; within them a blackened mass of still smoking débris was all that was left of what that morning had been a block of small houses, each house divided into four- and five-room tenements at low rentals. Just as Cis and Rodney came up there emerged from the side street, evidently coming around from the rear of the burned block, a tall, thin figure in a long black coat; Cis instantly recognized Father Morley, and as quickly he recognized her, at least for one whom he had been seeing at the eight o'clock Mass. He possessed the natural gift of retaining faces in his memory, a gift heightened to the highest degree by the training of his Order, and his intense interest in the soul behind each face.

Cis, meeting his deep-set, keen, gentle eyes, bowed instinctively. The priest instantly returned the bow with a smile that lit up his ascetic face as if a light had been thrown upon it, but in this case the light came from within, outward.

The Jesuit stepped up to Cis's side, taking it for granted that he was welcome.

"Good evening, my child," he said, and his voice, which always thrilled Cis when he preached his five minutes' sermon from the sanctuary, was still more moving heard in conversational tones at her elbow. She saw, too, that his face, thin, ascetic, worn, as she had seen it at the distance intervening between the church pews and the sanctuary, was more deeply graved with fine lines than she had seen;

he looked like a man who had found life a serious matter, and whose bodily health was not the best.

"Good evening, Father Morley," Cis replied.

"I do not know your name, but I know that you belong to me," said Father Morley. "I am sure that I have not met you. I see you at my Mass, at eight o'clock. Have you been long in Beaconhite?"

"No, Father. I came early in the summer. My name is Cicely Adair; I am Mr. Lucas' private secretary. You never have spoken to me before," said Cis. "Father Morley, this is Mr. Rodney Moore."

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Moore," said Father Morley with a quick, comprehensive look at Rodney. "English More, or Irish Moore?"

"My people on the Moore side came from Ireland," said Rodney, uneasy, and omitting the courteous title at the end of his reply to Father Morley.

"That's good!" said the priest, as if Rodney deserved credit for his ancestry. "Though, to be sure, the English More once meant great things, when the lord chancelor bore the name who would not betray his God to save his head! Not that we would not all reckon martyrdom a splendid prize for which to hold out! You are in another parish, not St. Francis'? I don't recall your face."

"I'm in the St. Francis Xavier parish," said Rodney shortly.

The fine face of the priest changed slightly as he correctly interpreted this answer.

"I missed you this morning, Miss Adair," he said.

"You know, a priest gets into the way of unconsciously looking for familiar faces when he turns to give the notices and read the Gospel; you are weekly in the same place. I am glad that you are not ill."

"No, Father," replied honest Cis, making no excuse to gloss her absence. "I did not go to Mass; I wanted to take an early train."

"Good for her; coming straight out, no cringing!" thought Rodney, misinterpreting Cicely's honesty.

Father Morley shook his head. "And not make the effort required to go to six o'clock Mass first, or even to the Mass at two? It is worth considerable effort to keep from offending God," he said.

"Six o'clock? The eight o'clock Mass is the first one, isn't it?" cried Cis.

"No, indeed! Who ever heard of such a late hour for the first parish Mass in such a large parish?" exclaimed Father Morley. "We have a Mass at two a. m. for the newspaper men and other night workers, trolley men, railroaders, all those people. The next Mass is at six. Then ours is not the only church in town! There are nine churches in Beaconhite, all told."

"Bad influence, danger ahead!" thought the wise priest. "I like the girl!"

"I could have made the six o'clock at St. Francis Xavier's; I might have asked if there was one, but I didn't," Cis looked straight into the priest's keen eyes. "I'm a careless girl, Father; I never thought

so much about these things as Nan—that's my friend at home—did."

"Difficult to think too much of things which are unending," commented the priest. "I approve of Nan and am glad that you have so good a girl friend."

He smiled, with a slight sigh, and walked onward in silence beside Rodney, taking it for granted that they would continue together as their ways lay in the same direction. Rodney was at once uncomfortable and angry, angry that he was uncomfortable. There was a silent power in this priest that he felt and resisted; it annoyed him to see that Cis felt it and did not resist it. It was impossible to say wherein it lay, but it was there, strong and as unmistakable as it was indefinable. That it was the manifestation of the sum total of the gifts of the Holy Ghost did not occur to him, nor would he have admitted it, but just as those recorded in the Gospel cried out against that Power to which they would not yield, so Rodney in his heart cried out against this quiet person, walking beside him unintrusively, saying nothing remarkable, certainly nothing in direct rebuke. Yet every fibre of Rodney's being rebelled, and he felt that Cis was accepting and readjusting to that implied reproach.

"Must have been quite a fire," Rodney said, trying to introduce a topic that was indifferent.

"Indeed it was, a shocking fire," Father Morley corroborated him. "It was a gasoline fire in a tenement; could anything be worse? The young

daughter of one of the tenants was cleaning gloves, I understand, in a room which was dark, using a lighted lamp, and there was not much air in the stuffy place. She did not realize how far the fumes would draw to heat where there was so little oxygen. Not only that tenement burned, but the entire block. Most of these people had kerosene oil in cans. Ah, it was a frightful fire! The firemen saved every life, but several people were badly burned, dangerously so, and a child was nearly trampled to death. One of the firemen was hurt; I came to anoint him and one or two others, but none will die—thank God!"

"Well, I suppose 'thank God' is the conventional phrase, but it doesn't always fit," said Rodney with a bitter, short laugh. "I suppose, too, that all these people had palm in their houses, blessed especially for protection against fire, lightning and general violent catastrophe!"

The Jesuit frowned slightly; Cis looked half amused, and he saw it.

" 'Thank God' is appropriate to whatever befalls those who trust in Him," he said. "I would imagine the blessed palm was in those tenements, since, in spite of carelessness and ignorance, against which we cannot expect protection from their lighter consequences, no lives were lost. I am glad that you recognize the Providence that intervened, Mr. Moore; many people miss the province of its workings."

"I think that I recognize its province precisely, Father Morley," Rodney said. "It is distinctly

limited. I would say that, if there be a God, He sets things going, and then leaves them to themselves. I am not a Catholic, though my people were."

"I would hardly have mistaken you for a Catholic, my poor son," said the priest quietly. "You have left the Church of your fathers? Better come to confession; remove the impediment to faith, and faith will revive. Strange to throw away that treasure to acquire which so many sacrifice everything earthly! My father, for instance, was an Episcopal clergyman. He came into the Church and suffered actual want, besides the cruel persecution which only near and dear kindred can inflict, in order to possess the Truth and the sacraments. But you are young and God's arm is long; you will come back. A good friend can do a great deal for us!"

The priest smiled at Cis, who looked up at him with a smile in return, yet a troubled look.

"A *good* friend can, Father, but lots of people don't have *good* friends—like Nan!" she said, with emphasis on the adjective.

"All goodness is comparative, my child," Father Morley said. "I see that you regret your own deficiencies, which is a most healthful symptom! It is everything to be honest, and more than everything to be humble!" He laughed at his intentional clumsiness of word. "It must be a little lonely for you, a stranger here? You say you are Mr. Lucas' secretary? I know Mr. Lucas' brother."

"It was he who gave me my letter to Mr. Wilmer Lucas," cried Cis eagerly.

"Really? He is a noble man; I don't wonder that Mr. Lucas welcomed you," Father Morley looked pleased; he was beginning to feel cordial liking for Cis, with a perceptive anxiety for her safety. "I know Mr. Lucas, this Mr. Lucas, but he is not my friend, as his brother is."

Father Morley did not explain that he had instructed Mr. Robert Lucas and received his submission to the Church, and that this new instance of the Jesuit wiles had made Mr. Wilmer Lucas cross the street from that day to this whenever he saw Father Morley coming.

"I have a club of fine girls, all self-supporting, a jolly, delightful lot, they are! How would you like to come to one of their 'open nights'? That's what they call the nights when outsiders are admitted. You'd enjoy them, and they'd take you right in. No need of being lonely, my child! Let's see: Thursday, Holy Hour; Friday the League; Monday night their private, members-only night; Wednesday! That's it! Come on Wednesday, and see my fine girls!" Father Morley beamed at his triumphant conclusion.

"Thank you, Father," said Cis, and meant it. "I'm not lonely. I am happy in Beaconhite; I don't have much spare time. But you are good to ask me."

"Not a bit good!" said the priest. "The club is for girls, isn't it? And you are a girl, aren't you? I turn off here. Good night. Good night, Mr. Moore."

He held out his hand and Rodney unwillingly took it.

"God bless you, my poor lad," said the priest gently. "Help and bless you."

He turned to Cis with great kindness, a sweet gravity, a steady look that told her that he fully understood her situation and recalled her to her duty with something of the infinite pity of God and His love for souls which grope. She knew that the priest saw that she loved Rodney, and that his prophecy of the outcome of that love would not accord with Rodney's own forecast of her perfect bliss.

Father Morley held out his hand and Cis put hers into it, lifting her eyes to the deep-set ones above her, which rested upon her as if they would draw her up through their light into the Highest Light.

"Good-bye, my child. Remember that we hear confessions at St. Francis' regularly on Fridays and Saturdays, afternoon and evening, and at any other time when we are called out, and that a mortal sin should not rest an hour upon the soul. Come to see me in the house; I should like to know you," he said, ignoring Rodney, whose anger flamed into crimson in his cheeks and flashed in his eyes.

"Thank you, Father Morley," replied Cis, ill-at-ease, conscious of Rodney's annoyance, devoutly wishing that "Father Morley wouldn't," yet responding to his summons with a half perception of its value to her. "I shouldn't know how to call on

you; I never knew a priest, not that way. And I don't get time, really."

"And you are not lonely now, and would rather not have an old Religious bother you, my dear? Very well; but remember that when you need him, Father Morley is waiting, and, when things get too hard to bear, or the strain is too strong for your young hands to hold back on the ropes, come to him and he will help your feebleness. Don't forget, Cicely Adair, that I shall be watching for you."

So saying, the Jesuit raised his hat with a courtesy that included both the young people, and went off down the side street with a long, striding gait, his hands thrust into his coat-sleeves, his shoulders bent forward like a man so accustomed to meditation that the instant that he was released from talk, from attention to the needs of others, he was off and away to other realms than this.

"The old meddler!" exclaimed Rodney. "Don't you go near him, Cis! They'll make you into one of their idiot women, crazy for novenas and church work, always lighting candles and trotting around to ask a priest whether roast pork really is indigestible, or whether all-wool flannels are better than half-wool, or whether it is a sin to use a mud worm for bait, because it looks like flesh, and the fish eats it, and we eat the fish on Friday! Idiots! I'd beat a woman, if she belonged to me, and got feeble-minded in that particular way!"

Cicely moved slightly as if she were awaking; her eyes were fixed on Father Morley's retreating

figure; she had not heard Rodney's diatribe against piousity.

"He is good," she murmured. "I feel as though the statue of St. Joseph in the church had been talking to me! He's like that, like something that looks like a man, but is 'way beyond one. And he's kind, like St. Joseph; he must have been kind! And he's ready to do anything for you, but he never could be common human! I wish——" Cis checked herself. "Oh, Rod," she said, turning to him with a flooding blush upon her face and clutching his sleeve as if she feared to lose him, "Oh, Rory, dear, you are hungry; you said you were! Let's get a supper for you; I'm not hungrier than a box-of-crackers supper!"

"Crackers nothing!" growled Rodney, but he tucked Cis's hand into his arm. "That restaurant is right around the corner. The old chap has half spoiled my appetite! Come along, though, Holly, and hang on to me; I'll feed you well!"

CHAPTER X

PUBLIC FRANCHISE AND PRIVATE THRALDOM

THERE was a matter of state and interstate, if not of national importance afoot, a lively correspondence in its regard flying between the Lucas and Henderson offices in Chicago, Washington and Beaconhite. A franchise was in question which must pass, not only the legislatures of three states, but at last be established or annulled by the passage of a Congressional Act which would react upon the state legislatures' decisions on the franchise, making it effective or practically without value. Energetic and clever lobbying to insure this franchise was vehemently carrying on in the capitals of the three states concerned, and at Washington as well. Millions were at stake upon the issue; immense sums being spent for the passage of the bill; greater sums waiting those lucky stockholders who should profit by the enterprise when it was in working order, notably those who "got in on the ground floor," who took up as much of the stock as was put out on the market for sale, at a price beyond which shares would rapidly soar once the inevitably profitable scheme was proved successful. There would not be much, or comparatively little of the stock offered upon the market; the corpora-

tion behind the enterprise was made up of solid men who could afford to wait for their future big percentage, secure to them if the thing went through. They did not purpose to let the general public share the chippings from the shell of their golden egg, except in numbers enough to forestall enmity to it on the ground of its being a private profit, maintained through public tolerance, via the Congress and legislatures. Correspondence in regard to this important matter passed in great bulk through Cicely's hands; she was interested in it to the highest point. The newspapers were full of allusions to the franchise, opposing it, supporting it, according to their bias for or against the political party favoring the measure. It amazed inexperienced Cis to find that this was the basis of newspaper influence, never the abstract benefit or harm to the public at large, which seemed to her mind the only ground upon which to favor or oppose the franchise.

Rodney laughed at her, and called her "Donna Quixote," a name that Cicely liked because it was linked with tender mockery in Rodney's eyes; she had never read "Don Quixote."

The correspondence in regard to the franchise which assailed Cicely's desk in Mr. Wilmer Lucas' office was couched in the code that had at first been such a stumbling block to her, but which she now read and wrote with complete fluency. It was excitingly pleasant to get inside information upon a subject that was occupying so much public attention.

"I feel as biggity as Brer Rabbit to be so deep in the know!" she told Rodney. Therefore on the Monday morning after her Sunday spent at Pioneer Falls, Cicely started out for Lucas and Henderson's office with her mind joyously attuned to anticipation, the anticipation of an interesting day superimposed upon the delicious certainty that Rodney loved her as well as she loved him, better perhaps, and that it was a matter of a few hours before she could be his promised wife.

Perhaps she should have been that now, had they not met Father Morley the previous evening. The priest had intruded upon the perfect oneness of her comradeship with Rodney; he irritated Rod, and, though Father Morley impressed her as a saint, and attracted Cis herself powerfully, yet Rod said that priests "were good things to keep away from," and if he felt so, then one could not expect him to find Father Morley's inopportune intrusion upon them agreeable.

But how beautiful had been Rodney's manner to her, Cis thought, as, in the knowing little hotel to which he had taken her, he had ordered and pressed upon her delicious food for which she had slight appetite, yet of which she ate, coaxed into eating by the wondrous delicacies and Rodney's ministrations to her.

They had not talked upon disturbing subjects, pleasant or the reverse, but had chatted happily, in complete harmony, laughing over their own nonsense, telling each other new bits of confidences, those insignificant-significant trifles of past experi-

ence which, taken together, make up a mosaic of complete mutual knowledge. There was nothing for Cis to tell except school scrapes and triumphs, funny or piteous things which she had encountered on her short road so far through life; stories of people whom she had known, pleasures and annoyances; her reactions toward them. They were simple tales to which Rodney harkened with profound interest, deriving from them an accurate estimate of this clean-minded, gallant Cis who loved him, as he saw; whom he meant to marry, and not Gertrude Davenport with her money, realizing that in Cis he had found the woman whose existence his experience had led him to doubt.

In return for her confidences Rodney told Cis similar stories of his boyhood, of his merry college days, of victories which he had won on the fields of sport, and, later, in the field of business competition. That there was much that Rodney did not tell her, honest Cis never suspected, still less that there was a side of his life, parallel with his advancement in business, upon which he did not touch. She listened breathlessly to Rodney's charming recitals, treasuring up his every word, so that it surprised him later to find how conversant she was with his boyhood and youth; proudly recognizing him as the cleverest and the best of lads whose present perfection had been clearly foreshown, missing nothing, because she looked for nothing beyond his revelations.

The remembrance of these intimate confidences of the evening before, lay warm at her heart; the

picture of the close-drawn crimson sash curtains in the leaded window beside them; the cream-white table, with its heavy cut work doilies; its delightful copper candlesticks, their parchment shades decorated by a skilled hand in Persian colors and designs, made a poetic background for her memories. Cis went out on Monday morning, whistling in her mind, her breath keeping up the air soundlessly against her motionless lips—Cis, the secretary, no longer whistled in the street as Cis, the telephone operator, would have done—and she almost ran into Miss Hannah Gallatin.

"Good morning!" they cried together, as Cis swerved to avoid a collision.

"I sort of hoped I'd meet you, Miss Adair; I had an idea you went out about this time," Miss Gallatin said, and added: "Mind if I walk along to talk to you?"

"Glad to have you, Miss Gallatin," Cis replied truthfully. "I've thought of you lots of times, and of how kind you were that morning when you asked me home with you, and advised me about boarding at Mrs. Wallace's."

"But haven't felt the need of a friend yet, so haven't hunted me up, as I told you to in case you ever did need one?" Miss Gallatin commented.

"I've been busy, learning all sorts of new things in the office——"

"And out of it," Miss Gallatin interrupted Cis. "See here, my dear girl, let me ask you bluntly: Are you engaged to my boarder, Mr. Moore?"

"No, Miss Gallatin, but I am really engaged

without being! It is exactly the same thing, and I'd have been engaged when you asked me, if you hadn't asked me to-day!" Cis laughed, but Miss Gallatin shook her head violently, having been shaking it gently as a running accompaniment and comment from the first syllable of Cicely's answer.

"Girl alive, it's not in the least the same thing!" cried the gaunt woman energetically. "Making love to a girl, and tying up to her under bonds are by no means the same! Men flirt and flit; woo and walk, and the girls think that there's so much honor back of warm looks that they're as secure behind a bow as a vow. Now, my honest Cicely Adair—for I know you're as straight a girl as walks —these words may sound alike, but their sounds and sense are quite different. I'm going to tell you something about G. Rodney Moore; he was running hard after Gertrude Davenport a while ago; she's a rich beauty, and now he's dangling after you. Honorable?"

Cis laughed long and merrily; it is not unpleasant to have victory over another girl attributed to oneself, however humble-minded and gentle-hearted the conqueror may be. Cis began to sing the once popular song:

> " 'But I never knew, dear,
> That I should meet you, dear;
> So let's forget the girls I met
> Before I met you!' "

"H'm!" grunted Miss Gallatin. "That's no

answer, though it's been given as one ever since Noë's grandson went gallavating! Miss Adair, you're a good girl not to slap me and bid me go about my own affairs, but I suppose you know that I want to befriend you. I know that you go off seeing the country with my captivating lodger, and it worries me. I don't trust that fellow; I never have. Now you *will* slap me! You'll put up with my meddling, but not with my misjudging your hero; is that so?"

"Well, I don't like it," said Cis, "but I'm sure you mean it kindly, and can't help seeing Rod crooked. In reality he's splendid, true as steel, kind—*splendid*, that's all!"

"He tells me that he shall not stay with me all winter, that he is looking about for an apartment, a small one. Know anything about that?" Miss Gallatin demanded.

"Oh, the absurd fellow!" cried Cis, blushing furiously to the roots of her brilliant red hair. "This winter! Mercy! No, Miss Gallatin, I don't know anything about it, but I suppose—This winter! Just imagine!"

"I do hope there's a deaf and dumb saint who intercedes for girls in love!" cried Miss Hannah Gallatin impatiently. "It would be the only one who could thoroughly understand her! Evidently you think the apartment means that G. Rodney expects to cage his bird, but I think that's by no means certain. You blind, honest little bat, it might mean anything else but that! Cicely Adair, I found out lately, accidentally dropping a book

out of which a card tumbled—one of G. Rodney's books—that he was once a Catholic!"

"Yes, he was," Cis said carelessly. "I knew that. He doesn't believe in any form of religion; he thinks it's all nonsense, but I'll learn to be a good Catholic myself, and then Rod will get straightened out."

"Cicely Adair, look out for the man that is not true to his faith; disloyalty to his God is a mighty poor argument for his loyalty to a woman. And do your converting before, not after you marry him! Something there I don't like; never have. I'm afraid for you, Cicely Adair. I wish I had proof—or else no doubts!" Miss Gallatin looked troubled.

Across the space of several months Jeanette Lucas' voice reached Cis as Miss Gallatin spoke; it said again to her:

"I thought that I should cure his one defect, his indifference to religion. I know now that he was false to all things, to me as to God! Cicely Adair, you're a Catholic girl; remember this lesson when you think of marrying."

Cicely shivered involuntarily, and the chill of the memory of this warning from the girl whom she had revered, then pitied, drove out the quick anger with which she had heard Miss Gallatin's last words, and made her answer quietly:

"I think you mean to be good to me, Miss Gallatin, and I appreciate it, but, please, nothing more against Rodney Moore to me. I ought not to have let you say one word! He loves me, as I love him, and he trusts me as I trust him. I don't know what

he will say when I tell him that someone warned me against him and that I let them—of course I must confess it to him! I shall marry him. There isn't anything else to do when the whole world would be black-empty without him! Even if I'm to be unhappy, still I must marry him. But I'm not afraid of being unhappy. How silly, how wrong, but still more how silly, to suspect people without a grain of reason! You haven't the least proof of Rod's being anything but what I've found him, the best, as he is the dearest, cleverest, kindest, biggest, truest man in all the whole wide world!"

"Forgive my meddling, Miss Adair," said Miss Gallatin humbly. "No one ever rescued a girl in love from her fate, even though she brought tons of proof against the man. And I have none; you're right. Nevertheless—But I'm to say no more! I like you, my dear; I truly like you, and I've known what it was to love a man madly, trust him utterly, and find him false and evil! If G. Rodney leaves my house for that apartment and you're not domiciled in it, will you come to board with me? I'd like to have you under my roof. And the day may come when you'll find queer, lean, ugly Hannah Gallatin better than no one. Like Mrs. Wallace's?"

"Oh, yes; it's all right," said Cis, glad to be let off from answering the previous questions. "It's clean, and she gives us lots of good food, but—Mrs. Wallace's women boarders are not all my fancy might paint them!"

"Fancy sketches 'twould be!" returned Miss

Gallatin. "Women boarders are a species by themselves; idle, censorious, meddlesome. Hers aren't peculiar to Mrs. Wallace; she's not to blame for 'em; mine are just the same! They're all alike, mostly, and when they're different from the rest, heaven help the different ones! The things I've seen women, who were supposed to be ladies when they were away from a boarding house table, do to get the hearts of the celery—gracious! I'm sure those at Mrs. Wallace's pick at you; you're too gay and independent to escape! Too young, besides! Well, that would be the same anywhere, but come to me if ever there's a chance. You can't come while G. Rodney's in the house; I won't have you! Now, good-bye, my dear! I do like you, and, somehow, the thought of you anxiously haunts me. Believe me, if you are happy with G. Rodney and can bring him back to his faith, if he'll be to you what you expect him to be, no one will be more glad than queer Hannah Gallatin! So don't hold a grudge in your memory of me, and come to see me some Sunday—if you have spare time!"

Cis heartily shook the worn hand which this peculiar, but sterling woman held out to her. She resented her suspicions of Rodney, yet in spite of them, she liked her cordially, and left her with a surprising warmth for her in her own heart, and a pity that recognized the tragedy which Miss Gallatin's brief allusion to her own perfidious lover revealed.

Cis walked on thoughtfully for a short distance after leaving Miss Gallatin, her thoughts grave,

almost somber. It was gloomy to know that once this woman had been young like her, full to overflowing with the joy which now filled Cicely, joy which had congealed under the cruellest ice, the cold of disappointment and disillusionment. But the perfidy of that older lover did not involve the perfidy of Rodney. Rodney! The word "perfidy" was an absurdity in connection with his name! Cis threw off her depression, squared her shoulders like a boy, and broke into a swinging pace, softly whistling: "But I never knew, dear," the song which she had hummed replying to Miss Gallatin. This time, casting aside her dignity as Mr. Lucas' private secretary, Cis whistled aloud in the street, albeit softly.

There were piles of letters waiting upon her desk when Cis sat down to it, letters in ordinary longhand and typed letters, but the majority of them written in the code peculiar to that office and to the secrets of its clients and associates.

Cis plunged into them, reading and assorting into piles letters relating to legal affairs, cases in which Lucas and Henderson, as a firm, were retained; letters relating to Mr. Lucas' personal clients, people who retained him as advisor in their affairs, rather as a wise man of sterling integrity than as a lawyer; letters of appeal, or asking information; last of all, letters in the code relating to the matter of the pending franchise; reporting its progress in the three states dealing with it, and with Congress; the likelihood of the bill passing

which would make it possible; suggestions of means which would further its success. The mail relating to the franchise, as well as his personal correspondence, Cis laid upon Mr. Lucas' desk; he would not come in before eleven, or possibly noon that day, having first gone to the bank to conduct that part of its business which fell upon him as its president.

Then Cis plunged into correspondence from yesterday's notes, which she must write up and dispatch. She was immersed in this when Mr. Lucas entered.

"Good morning, Miss Adair," he said and passed her to take up the papers which she had laid down, awaiting him.

He read rapidly, putting aside a few letters for a second reading, but he merely glanced through the letters which were not written in the code, stacking them for a return to them later on; evidently the one absorbing, pressing matter of that day was the franchise, soon to be decided.

"Miss Adair, you know a great deal that the outside world is eager to learn," said Mr. Lucas, looking over at Cis as she busily wrote at her desk, a short distance from his own. "There are many people's hopes hanging upon this pending franchise; many waiting to snatch up the shares of the new enterprise, to get them at the lowest possible figure. What would they not give to know now that the franchise is secured? They could buy today at 32¼, and sell within two months at fifty per cent above par! A profit not to be despised! And

within a year that profit will at least double. The newspapers are agog for inside information, for a tip as to the probabilities of the outcome, partly to secure a scoop over other papers, partly to serve political ends. What do you purpose doing with your knowledge, Miss Adair? Sell out to the highest bidder? Offer your knowledge, say, to a New York paper, and make it do something handsome for you, in return for the advantage you offer it?"

Mr. Lucas spoke with a smile that showed that he considered Cicely far beyond the reach of temptation thus to betray confidence. His face also expressed great satisfaction, even relief. As the president of a national bank, it might prove unpleasant for him if the failure of the franchise disclosed him deeply concerned in its success. Mr. Lucas was playing with Cis and the fancy of her betraying him, under the necessity for some outlet for the satisfaction which his face revealed.

Cis looked up and smiled.

"No; I won't sell you up, Mr. Lucas," she said. "Is it settled then? Is the Big Deal on? Is the franchise secured?"

"I thought you read the letters, Miss Adair. You aren't forgetting the code, are you?" Mr. Lucas looked half-annoyed, half-amused. "I want you to go over the mail carefully, and I surely want you to read the code straight."

"I did read the letters, Mr. Lucas, and I understood that they were favorable, but—to tell the truth, I understood what I read enough to do the

right thing with them, but the letters did not make much impression on me; I had something important on my mind," candid Cis explained.

Mr. Lucas laughed outright. "A girl is a girl, clever or stupid, faithful or unreliable! I'd wager I could shrewdly guess the important subject. Important, mark you! The franchise being a mere bagatelle! Well, well, Miss Adair, I've no doubt that you did precisely as you say you did, read and understood, and forgot for really 'important matters' when you had read! The franchise is assured, Miss Adair, and great events are afoot! I am as delighted as I have been anxious about it. We shall all profit, but it is my honest conviction that the profit to the public will exceed the money returns. Be careful not to know all this, if you please; the information must not leak out yet, not for two months more," Mr. Lucas warned Cis.

"I'll keep quiet, Mr. Lucas. I've been approached by a few Poll Prys, but—nothing doing!" Cis laughed gaily, permitting herself a relapse into the slang which her new dignity had been making her eschew.

That evening Rodney met Cis just beyond the door of the building which housed the Lucas and Henderson offices, when she came forth at nearly five o'clock.

The sight of him, handsome, faultlessly dressed, debonair, smiling happily as they came toward each other, set Cicely's pulses bounding joyously; his presence was the sufficient answer to the doubt

of him suggested by Miss Gallatin, repudiated by Cis, yet, like all doubts, hard to silence completely, even when downed.

"Oh, Rod, I'm glad!" cried Cis almost running over the short distance intervening between them.

"Oh, Cis, I'm gladder!" echoed Rodney. "What's amiss, Cis? Amiss-Cis; goes along slick, but Cis is never amiss!"

"I want to confess to you, Rory," said Cis, as Rodney turned to walk with her.

"The only one I want you ever so much as to think of confessing to," Rodney said approvingly.

"Someone warned me that it wasn't safe to play with you, Rory O'Moore, that I'd be sorry later on, that you weren't quite, quite all right, trustworthy, you know. I didn't really listen; I did not believe, and I said that sort of talk had to stop, but it was said, Rod, and I'm ashamed of myself that I let more than your name get past. I didn't listen, I didn't truly, but too much was said." Cis poured out her confession eagerly.

"Who was it? Who was she? Safe to say *she*, of course! What else did she tell you? Anything I ought to know—and that you ought not to know?" Rodney looked furiously angry, and somewhat alarmed.

"Don't ask me who it was; I won't tell. I won't say it was a woman; may have been a man. And nothing was said, more than I've told you; that the person doubted your being safe for me to play with," cried Cis. "I'm sorry I heard more than one word."

"The old gal, I'll bet! Funny old Gallatin; she always suspects me," cried Rodney. "Why, Cis; why, Holly, my darling, there's no one on earth half as safe as I for you to play with! How dares she think I'd harm you, grieve you? Never any other man loved a girl as I love you. I'm mad about you, Cis, you—you glowing Holly-berry! I never dreamed there was such a girl on earth. When we're married—My heavens, *when we're married!* Cis, oh, Cis, you can't dream how happy we're to be! Did she think maybe we wouldn't marry? Cis, we shall, we must! You're going to marry me, aren't you, my darling, my glowing ruby-jewel?"

Cis looked up, trembling, forgetful of fear, of doubt, responding to the call of this love that blotted out the world with as much ardor as its summons held. "Yes, oh, yes! I'd die else," she said.

Rodney drew her to him oblivious to the highway and its many passers-by, but Cis came to her senses, and eluded his arms.

"Oh, Rod, Rory dear, we're engaged!" she almost sobbed. "We are really, truly engaged, and isn't it beautiful! Do people get engaged like this, without meaning to, just sort of talking, and then there you are? And it's so public, and so queer! But, oh, Rory O'Moore, it's so beautiful! What can it mean, it's so beautiful?"

"It means that by your birthday, by Christmas, my Holly-berry, you'll be in your own home, in *my* home, my wife, and that no cold nor storms shall ever touch my Christmas bride! Oh, Holly,

Holly of my heart, red and glowing, thorns for all else, but for me the crimson fruit of your love!" cried Rodney, stammering under an emotion which unconsciously turned back to the phrases of his Celtic forbears for its expression.

CHAPTER XI

THE WEAKNESS OF STRENGTH

"I SEE the whole world through your tresses, Holly! They cover my eyes as a veil and everything glows, shines with glory!" Rodney had said to Cis.

It was true of them both that a joy past realization, past expression, filled and flooded their ways and their days. Cicely gave herself up to the rapture of a love so mighty that it was almost pain; gave herself with the generosity of a nature honest, fearless, intense. Rodney found her love for him far exceeding his expectation of it, and he had expected to be endowed beyond the average man by the love of a woman who, more than any that he had ever known, asked nothing for herself but to be allowed to submerge herself.

He was delirious, breathless at times when she bared to him her rare, sublimated passion, yet there was in her a quality which awed him, while she enkindled him. Cis loved him with all the forces of her royal human nature, yet with it she also loved him with a purity of soul that frightened the man, ten years her elder, versed in the ways of lesser women. Crimson as a flame fed by her life-blood burned her love upon the altar she erected to it, but over and above the red flame of human

love, burned a white flame of utter devotion, idealization, spiritual detachment; it dominated and sublimated the love that, though it was rare, yet was lower than this, its supplement. Wonderful in a girl whose life had not trained her for the highest form of love, was this purity of aim which Rodney recognized at all times in her.

Rodney himself arose to reverence this idealized love, to defer to it. He was not a man whose life was notably better, nor was it worse than the average man's life. He had thrown off his religion because it would have thwarted him; because its law bore heavily upon his particular case; because it never had meant much to him, and this world fully engrossed him. He meant to be both rich and happy; he had intended to marry ambitiously, but Cis had come, with her red hair, and it had burned like dross everything that would have stood between her and him. He had fallen in love with Cicely Adair passionately and honestly; to get her and hold her his he was more than ready to throw over any other woman, however full her hands might have been when he had espoused her. After he had won Cis, Rodney was ready to stake anything on himself; he felt that he was sure to get the worldly goods which he craved. Cis must be first. Now that he had Cis, he knew that, even if he missed the riches, he should be rich. She filled his horizon, filled his eyes and heart, yet she held him indescribably above himself; she humbly worshipped him, abasing herself with wonder that such as he should love her, yet never descended to what

Rodney himself knew was his natural level, nor ever for an instant suspected that she held him down while she lifted him up by assuming that he was the type of man whom Arthur tried to form to sit at his Round Table.

Cicely mystified Rodney; she was at once flame and starlight. He could not understand that the flame was of the sort that burned away dross; that Cis loved him with such overwhelming love that she walked under a sense of consecration. He could not understand, yet he recognized this and deferred to it in a way that amazed himself when he came to think it over. He could not risk letting Cis find him less than she believed him. Her trust in him, her idealization of him, humbled him and intrigued him. Could he marry Cis, deceiving her? Could he undeceive her? After they were married Cis would learn to accept things as they were; she would not love him less; she would love him more, tremendous as her love now was, for then there would be the complete blending which was marriage. Cis was not the sort of woman to criticise her husband. She would understand and justify him when she was his wife, nor would her slender hold upon the dominant Old Church be maintained against the clutch with which she would hold to her husband. Rodney's fingers tightened as he thought how he would hold his wife, although Rome itself were hurled upon his grasp that held her. He knew that his love now flooded Cicely's whole being with joy; when he was married to her he would show her that she had known no more of

joy than the bird in the shell knows of the sunlight awaiting it.

Cis had received her engagement ring from Rodney, not the conventional diamond.

Rodney had a friend who was a dealer in precious stones; from him he had obtained a ruby perfect in color, beautifully cut, and he had himself designed its setting. Holly leaves laid one upon another, points resting each upon the following leaf, formed the ring; four leaf points converged to hold the wonderful ruby high to catch the light. It glowed and pulsated upon Cicely's slender, nervous hand as if it refracted the light within her, the glow of her love for her lover.

"Oh, Rod, my dearest, it's beyond words to praise!" sighed Cis, turning her hand to give the ruby light upon every side. "It's too wonderful for me!"

Rodney caught her head between his hands and kissed and kissed her red hair. Then he crushed her face against his and held her lips to his in a long kiss.

"I deserve it," he said releasing her. "The ruby is you; how can it be too wonderful for you? No white diamond for you, but a ruby, like this one. You are my Holly, my glowing, ruby-red Holly! My Christmas Gift! Cis, we shall be married on Christmas Eve? Sis, I beg of you, don't ask me to wait longer! That's almost two full months! I've found the apartment; I haven't told you, but it's a little bit of all right! Christmas Eve our wedding! Christmas morning, when the bells

ring, to say for the first time: 'Good morning, my wife!' 'Good morning, Rod, my own man!' And our Christmas breakfast in our own home—no trips away then; perhaps later!—but I yours, you mine, wholly, forever, my Holly upon my own walls! Cis, in mercy—say yes!"

"Rod! Rory, my darling!" Cis caught her breath, her words almost a cry. "I want to come and I can't! It's too soon, Rod dear! Only two months; not quite that! I could leap with you into fire when you call me, yet I can't marry, not so soon! Girls—girls—Oh, yes! Girls have to get ready, get clothes and things, and it takes time, Rod!"

"Cis, you're a royal princess, a giver by rank and nature! Would you put me off with such a mean, a dishonest excuse? Do you know what you ask when you ask me to wait? You, the generous, the unselfish, the royal giver! As though you hadn't clothes! If you have enough to go to Lucas and Henderson's every day you have enough to live in your own home, hidden from all eyes but mine—and they won't see your clothing, my Holly! We'll live only about seventy years, all told; less than fifty more! Will you waste time? How dare you waste time, youth time, too! We should have been married these four years, at least. You could have been married at eighteen, if I'd have known you then—No, we couldn't! I couldn't have married you then, my own. You are my own, Cis! Nothing else is mine! Cis, I've had a harder life than you know; I'm going to tell you when we're in our

home, sitting down all alone, you in my arms, your dear red head on my shoulder! But don't be a niggard with me, generous Cis! Make up my hard luck to me. Oh, make it up to me! You'll wipe out memory of the word hard luck! Cis, how can you think of delaying life together? It's cowardly, unfair, cold love, and these things are not in you! Christmas, Holly?"

Rod had pleaded with such quivering earnestness that Cis paled and trembled before it, swept beyond her power to hesitate, even beyond deciding.

"My poor Rory! Were you so badly off four years ago?" she murmured. "But I'd have married you, if you were a beggar with a little dog on a string! I'll come home to you at Christmas, then, my own Rodney; I'll keep my birthday with my husband in my own home. Oh, Rory O'Moore!"

For Rodney had fallen at her feet and was kissing her hands over and over again, kissing the ruby which he had placed upon one of them, as if he feared his own joy, and for the moment dared not rise to the level of the girl who had shackled her brave freedom for his sake, who so trusted him and sacrificed for him.

Three days later Cis received an invitation from Miss Gallatin to dine and spend the evening with her. Rodney had told his eccentric, but fine landlady of his engagement and speedy marriage. In default of relatives on either side Miss Hannah Gallatin felt it incumbent upon her to do something as a mild celebration of what had happened,

the more that she had doubted Rodney, and, for lack of anything else upon which to hang that doubt, had feared that he was playing with Cis, would never marry her. Besides this, with the ardor of her own strong, and comparatively recent adherence to the Catholic Church, she was anxious about Cicely's marriage to a renegade from it, Cicely, whose own lukewarmness was only too evident.

Miss Gallatin was not an ordinary boarding house keeper; queer as she was in appearance, uncouth and almost shabby in attire, she had come of good stock; her youth had passed in refined, even luxurious surroundings; she was well-read, clever, was what used to be meant by "a gentlewoman." She was dependent upon her own exertions for a livelihood because her patrimony had passed from her wholly into a brother's hands, owing to her father's conviction that nothing of his must ever be administered by one who would be likely to use its smallest fraction to benefit that menace to American institutions, the Roman Catholic Church.

Miss Gallatin did not invite Cicely to dine at the common table; it was not covenable to expose a young girl to criticism among her lover's fellow-boarders; she was so far from being their concern that they were sure to watch her closely and later to comment on her violently.

A small table was spread in a cozy room near the general dining room and in it Cicely and Rodney were to dine with their hostess, and a gentleman

whom Miss Gallatin explained to Cicely in private.

"I feel honored to entertain him, the gentleman whom you're to meet at dinner, Miss Adair," she said. "He's a great man, doing great things as if they were less than little ones. He has a fine estate and plenty of money; is not married. He is not so much a good Catholic, as an enraptured one; he consistently puts his faith before all else. He has travelled everywhere, speaks several languages, has a great library, reads much, writes, too, a little, I believe; essays, articles on current questions, giving the Catholic point of view. He is organizing Catholic laymen and women to be ready to serve the Church wherever it is needed, and his quite splendid big house is the headquarters for this league of his. He has people staying there all the time who need what he can give; a chance for a convert to get on his feet, for instance, one who is impoverished by coming in, and a chance to find friends if he is alone, lonely, needing countenance and advice. He has a teacher of Italian there, to fit people to stem the tide of theft of Italian immigrants through bribery by the Protestant sects. All these sorts of things he does. He is well on toward forty; a knight riding to rescue, if ever there was one! I call him Sir Anselm—not to his face! In fact, I rarely see him. He's in town, and I'm gratified to death that he's going to stay here. He's come to see Miss Miriam Braithwaite; she's a great friend of his, one of his sort, a convert. His name is Anselm Lancaster."

Cis heard this long tale of the man whom she was to meet, without actually hearing it; she felt no smallest interest in this fine gentleman, nearing forty, who was spending his days, strength and means for his Church and hers. If she thought at all of what Miss Gallatin told her as she made her hair tidy for dinner, it was that he "must be fusty and musty, pokey and dull to fuss over things like that." In the attractive little room where she dined, Cis was introduced to Mr. Lancaster. She saw him tall, slenderly built, elegant in dress, fine of feature, handsome, perhaps, and with a gleam of pure humor in his eyes which was unexpected to her in an extremely devout man. Then she forgot all about him, for Rodney began to talk to Miss Gallatin, the stranger joined in, and in listening to Rodney, who did talk well and fluently, Cis forgot all else, her eyes as well as her ears feasting upon Rodney's perfections.

Occasionally Cis spoke, uttering one of her characteristic quick speeches, much to the point, with a humorous turn and a keenness of insight that made Mr. Lancaster look at her attentively, smiling upon her as if he were ready, desirous more correctly, to draw her into conversation, but Cis did not see this, nor did she respond beyond the requirements of civility, to the remarks to this end which he addressed to her. It came out that Cis was secretary to Mr. Lucas, and when he heard this Mr. Lancaster turned to her with alacrity.

"Mr. Wilmer Lucas?" he cried. "Lucas and Henderson? That office is deeply concerned with the

franchise now before the legislature and Congress. Everybody is agog to know how it is going. I, myself, am imploring all the saints to get it through! It will matter greatly to my plans, if it succeeds. I'm going to be able to found an Italian colony, if it goes through; give employment to many heads of families, and save no end of bambini from proselytizing societies for their destruction! You must know something about the way the matter is tending, Miss Adair. Please admit that it is trying, to feel that the knowledge one needs is just across the table, but wholly inaccessible, enclosed by the nimbus of your hair, sacred as a trust."

"I know all about it," said Cis. "I handle the whole correspondence, but I'm not talking."

"Don't imagine that I would suspect you of betraying a trust, still less that I would want information at that price," said Mr. Lancaster. "It must soon be decided and made public. Interesting to see the inner wheels go around, drop a little accelerating oil on them in a hidden corner!"

"Yes," agreed Cis. "I like wheels, things getting done. But I don't care more about that franchise than anything else, except that everybody seems to be wild about it. Rather sport to be the only one in the know, except your principals! What I'd like to find out is who's going to carry off the World's Series Championship!"

Mr. Lancaster laughed, with a friendly and admiring look at unconscious Cis, who was laughing at Rod's assurance that he could tell her, only she wouldn't believe him. They had a bet on the re-

sult of the baseball season, on the chances of which they differed.

After dinner there was music; Mr. Lancaster played the piano remarkably well, and Rodney had brought his violin; he played with brilliant excellence music that was sometimes sentimental, sometimes frolicsome, always popular, and never classical. Cis had a pleasant voice and sang with natural expression and taste, but she could not be induced to utter a note.

"I don't want to sing where I can be heard," she explained. "Padded cell, solitary confinement for my concert hall!" and again Mr. Lancaster laughed at her; he evidently found her unaffected gaiety refreshing.

At last the evening was at an end, and Miss Gallatin was helping Cis into her coat preparatory to her leaving.

"So it's all settled, Miss Adair—let me call you Cicely, will you?" said Miss Gallatin.

"No, but say Cis; I like it!" Cis responded to the affection in the rugged, patient, lonely face over her shoulder. "Yes, it's settled! See the ring? I'm to be married at Christmas, if you please! My birthday."

"Are you a Noël maid?" asked Miss Gallatin. "I noticed the ring; most beautiful! Now I understand the holly leaves and the ruby single holly berry. A marvellous ruby, a significant and beautiful design for a Christmas girl!"

"Rod made the design; he calls me Holly," said Cis proudly. "He's a great Rodney!"

"Has he come back to the Church to thank God for you where He should be thanked?" asked Miss Gallatin softly. "I want to be sure of your happiness, my dear."

"Dear me, no, he hasn't, Miss Gallatin!" Cis laughed, but she spoke impatiently. "He is so good as it is, that I'm sure he's all right. I can't seem to worry over Rod!"

"You've got to build your house square with its foundation, if it's to stand," said Miss Gallatin. "Dear Cis, I do hope you'll be happy; be blessed, which is more. I suppose it may be that you're to be the torch bearer, lead G. Rodney Moore to heaven. God sees farther than we can! Did you like Mr. Lancaster?"

"Who's Mr. Lancaster? Oh, that man downstairs? He seems all right, plays like a dream, though I always think it is a little queer for a man to play the piano. Isn't he sort of religious-crazy? All right to be a Catholic, but you can't keep at it all the time, as if it was a hurdy-gurdy and the pennies would stop if you stopped grinding it!" Cis laughed at herself, and gathered up her gloves, ready to go.

"Oh, my child, can't you see the difference between grinding at a thing and being permeated with it?" cried Miss Gallatin. "You don't grind at the thought of Rod; you feel him, you breathe him, though you are not consciously thinking of him. So it is with the love of God; God is, and you exist in Him; there is nothing that is not of Him

in all your actions and thoughts, though it may be only that His presence is beneath it all, not conscious every instant to your mind. Thus Anselm Lancaster loves God."

Cis stopped short in her passage to the door, and stared silently for a moment at Hannah Gallatin. Then she said slowly:

"I never stop thinking of Rod; he is ceaselessly before my eyes; I breathe him, not air. Do you mean to say that anyone ever feels like that to God, to *God*, Whom you do not see, Who is—well, far off, not part of us, just—Oh, how shall I say it? Just *God*, heard about in church, not very well known?"

"Who is 'just God.' You said it well, poor Cis. Who is our Beginning, our End, in Whom 'we live, and move and have our being'; Saint Paul answered you before you asked your question. I mean that He is loved in that way by many, and that unless you share in that love to a degree, all other love will fail you, and life be wretched in its course and in its end," said Miss Gallatin solemnly.

Cis stared at her for another instant, then she turned to go.

"I never once thought that piety meant that," she said. "Yet of course God is what you say. It's quite nice; I never thought I liked piety much. Perhaps if you hang on tight when you don't get it, God lets you get it later on. But you must hang on awfully tight when you don't feel

like hanging, I suppose! Well, I certainly don't get it now! Thanks, Miss Gallatin. And thanks for the dinner and nice evening."

On the way to Mrs. Wallace's Rodney broke a long silence by saying:

"That man was interested in you, Holly; he sat up and took notice when you spoke."

"Did he? Who did?" asked Cis, emerging from her thoughts.

"Who did! How many did you meet? I'd think you were playing off, Cis, if you ever played tricks, off or on! That Lancaster stained-glass ecclesiastical piece, to be sure!" retorted Rodney. "Gracious, what a fool a man makes of himself—woman, either!—when he or she get going on religion! Thank the gods, we are free from humbug! Say, Cis, how much do you love me?" Rodney sought her hand to punctuate his question.

"Kids say: 'More'n tongue can tell!' I suspect that's the answer, Rory O'Moore!" said Cis.

"I want you to prove it, my treasure!" said Rod. "I've been thinking of it for some time. I saw when you were talking to-night of that franchise that the matter was already decided, that you knew which way it was going. Cis, I'd never ask you to betray that code of your firm's; I'd never ask you to do a thing that was wrong, but I more than ask, I beg of you, give me a hint, tell me whether the franchise is going through or not. Cis, listen before you answer! I'll never, I swear to you, let another person have a hint of what I know, nor will anyone ever guess I've had inside information.

I've a little money, a few thousands; that stock can be bought for, say .33, brokers' commissions and all told. It will sell for 200 within a year, if it goes at all. Tell me only this: Shall I take the stock to the limit of my capital, or is it hands off? See? I don't ask for a word directly on the franchise, but shall I buy or let it alone? Tell me, Cis; it's for us both, you know."

That last appeal stiffened Cis. She cried impatiently:

"Do you think I want to profit by dishonor?"

"Cis, Cis, my Holly bride, my wife in eight weeks, do listen to me!" implored Rod. "It isn't wrong to give me the tip; I won't let anyone else share it; you wouldn't be betraying confidence, but you would share your knowledge with your full self. You and I will be one person months before that franchise matter is public, likely. Only this, Cis: Shall I buy that stock, or not? Just nod yes, or shake your head, no. Make me by a nod, or save me by a shake of the head; that's all! I need money, Cis. You hesitate! Fine old love yours is!"

"Oh, Rod, I can't! Don't you see I can't?" begged Cis. "Don't ask me, don't! Mr. Lucas—they all trust me. I never played anyone false in all my life——"

"Except me!" cried Rodney bitterly. "You're my wife, or as good as that, with all yourself pledged to me, yet when you can serve me, merely by a tiny nod when I ask: 'Cis, shall I buy that stock?' you are stiff-necked and indifferent; you won't by

the tiny inclination of your head help me upon my feet! Shame, Cicely Adair! It's not what I call love; it's not what I counted on in you! I thought you'd die for me, if need were! It's not the money, not first! You fail me, Cis; you refuse to help me!"

"Oh, Rod, oh, Rod!" cried Cis in torture. "You know, you know it's all false! I—can't! Oh, I will, I will! Oh, Rod, don't look like that, not at me; not at Cis! I'll die for you, I will! I shall be dead if I'm no longer trustworthy, but I'd die for you! Buy the stock. The franchise is decided; it is going through! Oh, Rod, Rod! Oh, what have I done!"

"Right, my precious, my darling! Anyone would say you had done right. No one will be the worse for it, and I'll be far, far better! We'll be better! Bless you, my Holly girl, my brave, true, loyal Holly girl!" cried Rodney triumphantly.

"Don't call me loyal!" Cis gasped. "And plan so I'll never profit by that money. Rodney, it is heaven to love you, but, oh, it can be hell to have anyone so necessary to you that everything goes down before the dread of paining him!"

Rodney left Cis on the steps of Mrs. Wallace's house, looking wan and pale, grief and terror in her wide eyes, but he did not pity her. He was sure that she would soon throw off what he considered her morbid exaggeration of her failure to keep her employers' secret.

"Fancy her not telling me! The silly darling!" Rodney thought, striding away, whistling loudly

the air with which he serenaded Cis when he passed down her street at night; he was sure that she was still standing within the open door; listening to his receding steps and his merry whistling.

"I've got her where I want her! Exactly where I I want her! She'd throw over this world, and the next, and everything in them for me! There's not another like her; all mad love for me, yet crystal clear in soul! Oh, *soul!* It's not that; it's her honesty, her truth, her selflessness! I can't seem to face fooling her; I guess I'll have to lay the cards on the table in front of her, before Christmas, too! I don't want to fool Cis Adair! And there's not the slightest risk in doing it, not now! Probably there never was. She's no doddering slave of ignorant prejudice! Besides, I've got her where I want her; to-day proved that! Dandy good thing it happened; tested her, gave me pluck to start in square with her, and honesty's the only policy with Cis, that's sure! Just where I want her! My splendid girl! It hurt, but she stood pat! Conscience won't make a coward of brave Cis! And afterward I'll know how to salve the conscience if it happens to smart a little. After Christmas I'll be her conscience! Just where I want her, that gorgeous Cis of mine!"

Rodney went on glowing with triumph, the haunting dread of his past weeks almost laid, and Cis, when the last echo of his going had died away, closed the door and went up stairs slowly, for the first time in all her life seeking her bed with a heavy heart.

CHAPTER XII

THE STRAINED CABLE

THERE was a new element in life for Cis, a chord in its accompaniment that jarred, though she tried not to hear it. For the first time since she had been old enough to deal consciously with other people, Cis had done something in relation to another of which she was ashamed. When she omitted Mass on days of obligation, when it occurred to her that her infrequency at the sacraments was not to her credit, she was a little sorry, half resolved to do better, but she was not ashamed: she indirectly counted upon "fixing it up." It is a noteworthy fact that people who do less for God expect Him to do more for them; they read the text: "because she has loved little much is forgiven her."

But in relation to question of honor, "dealing straight" as she put it, Cis was acutely sensitive. She told herself that it would be too much to expect of anyone not to give her betrothed information which she possessed and which would not go farther, which would, without harm to another, greatly benefit him. The fact which she could not argue down as it faced her frowningly, was that Mr. Lucas had made no exception to his prohibition against disclosing the secret which her position necessitated her knowing, that she had given her

pledge to keep it—and had broken it! For the sake of Rod, only, of course, to whom she owed her best help, but she had broken it!

The knowledge that she had failed in honor for the first time in her life shamed her, afflicted her. And back of this shame was a more poignant pain which she did not admit in her thoughts. It was Rod's pleading, his making this a test of her devotion to him, to which she had yielded. Rod had been indifferent to her duty when it stood in the way of his advantage. Was Rod, could Rod be—Cis never went farther, but that was far enough to leave her weary in mind.

The visible result of her inward torment was to make her more demonstrative of love for Rodney; he was surprised to see in her daily new proof of its strength, of her disregard of the reserve which, up to this time, had tantalized him in her, while it whetted his delight in the expressions of feeling which he wrung from her. Now she adored him openly, frankly, with a feverish eagerness which he might have correctly construed if his understanding of this type of girl had been more profound. He thought it was due to the rapidly nearing date of their marriage, and it made his head swim to think what Cis would be to him in her own home if the approach to its threshold so multiplied her sweet ways.

A letter had come to Cis from Nan in reply to hers announcing her marriage on Christmas eve, a Nan-like letter, full of love for Cis, but no less full of anxiety. "It seems so quick, Cis darling!" Nan

wrote. "To think that you'll be married before me, and I've known Joe almost all my life! You have not said that your Rod is a Catholic, but Moore is sometimes Irish, so I suppose he is one. You would not marry anyone who was not a Catholic? We've so often decided that it is madness to set out on a certainty that there'll be something serious to differ upon, when it's so hard, at best, for people to grow close together, so easy to differ. Besides, it's wrong; for the children's sake it's wrong—but you always said that yourself, so I'm sure Rod Moore is a good Catholic. Dearest Cis, I never could tell you how I hope and pray for you! For I'm always fonder of you than of any other friend I have. Lovingly, Your same old, Nan."

"Wonder what she'd say if she knew Rod had been a Catholic and given it up? Nan would far rather he'd always been Protestant, of course; it would be better, too. Wonder what in all the world she'd say if she knew he was determined to get me to give it all up myself? Nan would take the first train on here, carrying a big jug of Holy Water, and she'd simply souse Rod and me to drive off the devil—bless her heart! But I'm not going to quit. To be sure I did miss Mass last Sunday, but I go pretty regularly; I'll go every Sunday after I'm married, because it will be up to me to set a good example, bring Rod back. A person must have some religion, and it's silly to have one made by Luther, or Henry the Eighth, or someone; I could make one myself as well as that bunch! I suppose it would be easier to convert a Protestant

than turn Rod back; he's awfully down on it, really! I wonder why? That's not like being slack and lazy-minded! 'For the children's sake,' Nan says! Well, I hope I'll have children, certainly, but I'm not going to marry to please them, I'll tell them that right now! They'll have to take what they find, and if they'll grow up as splendid as Rod is, Church or no Church, I'll be proud of them! Funny little Nannie!"

"Rory O'Moore," Cis said that evening to Rodney, "I've got to 'fess to Mr. Lucas!"

"You've got to do nothing of the sort!" Rod angrily exclaimed. "Cis, don't be an idiot! What good would it do? Could you take back what you told me? You'd be a miserable sinner if you would, provided you could! Mr. Lucas is happy while he is ignorant; let him alone in that form of bliss! No harm is done, nobody wronged, nobody the wiser. What good would you do by telling on yourself? All you'd do is to mess up the situation. You'll be married and out of the office soon. My wife isn't going to keep on in business! Thanks to your tip, my dearest, we'll have a nice little increase to our income."

"I can't answer one of your common-sense statements, Rod," said Cis slowly, "but I can't go along with them. Mr. Lucas thinks what isn't true. Truth is the only basis for dealing with anyone. I've got to tell him exactly what I did; I can't breathe in his office while I know that when he looks at me he sees what isn't there. I don't care to own up, Rod dear, but when there isn't solid rock-bottom of truth

under my dealings, my relations with a person, I feel like that Irishman who didn't like aeroplanes because 'when they stopped there wasn't any place to stand to crank the thing!' When someone is deceived in you, if you don't make it straight, it's worse than playing with ghosts—they touch you and you touch them, yet neither of you is there at all!"

Rodney looked at Cicely for a long time, an inscrutable expression upon his face. She made a little grimace at him, twisting her lips and showing her dimple, but he did not respond with a smile. She thought that he was displeased with her, and again coaxed him with pursed-up lips, but Rodney's eyes were steady, clouded; he looked bothered, plainly was deep in thought.

"I'll put off telling, Rory O'Moore," Cis said, misunderstanding him. "If you hate to have me tell, I won't tell right away, but I've got to tell sometime, please, Rod!"

It was a week later that Rod said to Cis: "Will you come with me to the apartment to-morrow, Holly? I've had sent in a few odd chairs, and a table that hit me exactly where I live, and I'd like your opinion of them, Mistress-of-the-Mansion-elect!" They had agreed to pick out the furnishings of their home together, but Cis looked delighted at this departure from the bargain on Rodney's part, and gladly said that she would go with him to see his selections.

They had changed rôles for the week that had just passed; Cis, relieved by her definitely an-

nounced plan to confess her wrong-doing to Mr. Lucas, felt better about it, and had been bubbling over with fun and high spirits. Rodney, on the contrary, had been cast-down; Cis repeatedly caught him looking at her with such a sober and apprehensive look, that she had once been moved to expostulate with him.

"For pity's sake, Rory O'Moore," she cried, "stop looking at me as if you were saying: 'Doesn't she look natural! Poor thing, she was so young, and with all her faults I love her still! Not so still as this, though!' I'm not nearly as dead as I might be; in fact I'm quite lively, I think. What's wrong with me—or you—old chap?"

"I'm deciding something, Holly-berry," Rodney answered, not smiling at her nonsense. "I'm wondering what you'd want me to do about a certain thing, on which I can't consult you without giving the thing away, so you never would have a chance to decide it, after all. Sounds mysterious, but it's the best I can do by way of answering you. I'm wondering how you'd react under something I've a mind to do. You're the frankest human being I ever knew, Cis; you never have hidden meanings, nor lay a plot; you act outright and talk right out! Yet I'm not one bit sure of what you'd do under untried conditions; you're capable of doing one of two completely opposite things."

"Well," said Cis lightly, in too contented a frame of mind to pay close attention to what Rodney might be implying, "I'm glad you can't tell which way I'd jump. Sounds quite impressive, but

probably it's something like whether I'd go back on my bronzey little library and go in for red, after I'd sworn no red should come into my happy home! I'm more interesting if I'm uncertain; that's why you like women, you men, my Rory; they keep you guessing! I'm dreadfully afraid you do know all I think, and what I'd do, but it's dear of you to pretend I'm a nice sphinxy-sphynx!"

Rodney laughed; he had instantly regretted speaking as he had spoken, and he was glad that Cis's incorrigible light-heartedness prevented her from taking him seriously, gave him longer to decide whether he should pursue his original plan, and tell Cis the secret which he meant to tell her after their marriage, or put himself at her mercy by telling her at once. He knew that this was the only honorable course; he knew that, if their places were reversed, Cis would deal thus with him.

It was the last Sunday in November, the first Sunday in Advent, and Cis and Rodney were happily on their way to look at the three chairs of unusual design, and the beautiful mahogany table which, so Rodney delighted to put it to Cis, he "had sent home."

The day enveloped them with the caresses of Saint Martin's Summer; warm sunshine; gentle air that brushed over them as they walked, like wings that bore blessings; a cloudless sky, veiled with hazy warmth that softened, yet did not conceal the bright blue that stretched from horizon to horizon.

"The winter of our discontent is turned glorious summer by our sunny walk," said Rodney, making

an attempt to retain the sound and not the sense of the quotation which was lost on Cis. "Almost December first, only two days distant, and even this light-weight overcoat a burden! It's what my grandmother used to call a weather-breeder."

"I don't see why people want to take the polish off of a day like this!" cried Cis. "A day like this is a present from heaven, and I don't like to look a gift horse in the mouth. Rory O'Moore, don't you think it came just to rejoice with us and strew our path to our new little home?"

"Like a wedding flower girl? Oh, Cicely, you bride of brides! I'd think any day would smile and look pleasant when it came up at dawn to find us together," Rodney spoke with a little laugh in his voice, but it trembled too.

The apartment did not include many rooms, but they were—for apartment rooms—spacious. There were two excellent bedrooms, a small room for the maid, and its accompanying bath at the rear, a small kitchen, a pretty dining room, and a really fine living room, besides a tiled bathroom which was so white, so modern and perfect in its appointments that Cis found herself unexpectedly housewifely every time that she saw it. Mentally she screwed bright nickle fixtures upon the slabs built in for them, and hung heavily initialled towels upon glass rods, as she stood in the doorway, taking in the details of this room devoted to the practice of the virtue which is next to godliness.

"I'm going to turn out well, Rory O'Moore!" Cis announced, swinging around to face Rodney, who

had come up behind her and placed his hands upon her shoulders. "You always knew I'd be agreeable to have around, but you never dreamed I'd be a real, dyed-in-the-wool domestic character! Neither did I, but I shall be; I feel it coming on! I yearn to scrub this white floor and polish the faucets! The kitchen, with that white sink and draining board, and the cunning cupboard, goes to my head till it fairly spins with rapture! Oh, Rod, it's the sweetness of doing for you! I've been half scared to be married, even to you, but this apartment takes it all out of me! It's home and home-making; it's living for, and with, and in each other! Oh, my Rod, I'm not afraid, I'm *not!* I'm glad, *glad* I'm coming here to be with you, and scrub *your* rooms, and wash *your* dishes!"

"Holly, my blessed Holly!" Rodney breathed the words almost inaudibly into Cicely's ear, all that was fine in him moved and awed before her sweetness.

Voluntarily Cis threw her arms around his neck and kissed him, and caresses were rare with her, yielded only to his implorations. Rodney understood that she was betrothing herself anew, and he met her spirit in tune with it. Why did he fear to tell her his secret? This rare, deep-hearted Cicely would not fail him for a chimera!

The new table awakened little less than rapture in Cis; it was exactly to her mind. The three chairs no less; deep-seated, low, at once "impressive and home chairs," Cis pronounced them.

"Suppose we use them for awhile, Cicely dear," Rodney proposed. "I'd like to talk to you."

"All right; I'm ready to talk, or to listen," agreed Cis, dropping into the chair which she had at once pronounced "made for the lady of the house." "Sounds queer to hear you call me Cicely, Rodney!" she added, laughing at him.

"I'll have to learn to call you that in case we ever have company," returned Rodney. "See, here, Cis, I sort of dread to say what I'm going to say; please help me to it. I thought I'd tell you after we were married, but you're so keen to have things clear between you and Mr. Lucas, you're so straight, I thought—Cis, if you were anyone else, anything else but what you are, I'd follow my own judgment, but you're so crystal-clear—Cis, try to understand, and for pity's sake don't be prejudiced—There's no sense in building up false theories of life—"

Cicely was sitting erect and still, her lips parted, her very muscles eloquent of tensity of mind.

"What are you stumbling over, Rod? What are you going to tell me?" she demanded.

"When I talked to you about my life, told you about it, you did not notice that I said nothing about three years of it, when I was in Chicago," said Rodney.

Cis shook her head, groping backward in her memory to recall what he had said.

"Only that you were there for three years; that's all I remember," she said.

"How do you feel about second marriages, Cis?"

asked Rodney. "Would you hate to be a second wife?"

"Oh!" Cis gasped, and sank back in her chair.

"It's not—not so nice," she said hesitatingly. "To think you were married, actually married, fixed up a home before this one, brought a girl into it, loved her—Oh, Rod, were you? Were you—married—before?"

Rodney nodded. "Yes, Cis, I was. I had to tell you; please, please, don't mind, Cis!"

For a few minutes Cicely was silent, shading her face with her hand; Rodney waited breathlessly for her to speak.

At last she pushed back her hair with the hand that had rested against her forehead, smiled bravely, with a visible effort, and put out that hand to Rodney.

"Poor dear!" she said softly. "I'm sorry! It rather knocked me up at first, but I won't let it bother me long. All girls like to be the first, you know, but it's really all right, as long as you love me dearly now. You told me that you'd fancied others before me, so I did half-way know, but marriage is different. I didn't know you'd loved one well enough for that. I wish you'd told me sooner —But it was awfully hard to tell me at all, I see that, so I'm grateful to you for making yourself speak of it now. It is right to have told me before we were married; I don't know just how I should have felt if I'd found it out later; I'm so keen on honesty."

Rodney winced. "I know, Cis; that's why I had

to tell you. But that time was nothing like this; don't you imagine I ever felt for any other girl what I feel for you!"

"Ah, poor Other Girl!" murmured Cis. "I don't like to have you say what she would have hated! Better let me be a little bit sore, because I'll fight it down, and I'm alive, and it's like taking an advantage of a dead girl to say what you did. Do you mind talking of her, Rodney dear? Would you tell me about her? Does it hurt to speak of her? What did she look like? Dark hair and eyes, because mine are not. Was she little and sweet, or tall and splendid? Rod, oh, my poor Rod, you suffered, you must have suffered when she—died! And I could not be there to help you! I'd have helped you, dear. Will you tell me all these things? Can you bear it? Does it still hurt, Rod? If it does, oh, if it does, then this is not altogether my home! It is part hers, and so are you!"

"I don't care any more for her, Cicely Adair, than I care for your friend Nan's cat—if she has one! Don't you get notions! It was a mad infatuation; I might have known how she'd have turned out, but I was young, and—well, Cis, I got all snarled up with her. That's not much like my love for you!" Rodney cried.

"Oh me, oh dear!" Cis half sobbed. "I don't know whether that makes it better; I've got to get used to this, and go off to think it out by myself. When did she die? Where did you bury her?"

"In the Chicago divorce court," said Rodney savagely.

"In—the—" Cis stopped short, her eyes dilated, staring at Rodney, her hands clasping the arms of "the lady of the house's chair." "Rodney Moore, she is not dead? She is alive? You—you!—have a living wife?"

"No, no, no! Not yet, not yet, Holly! At Christmas I'll have," cried Rodney springing to his feet. "I am free, free as you are, *free!* I'm not married! I divorced her; she was as bad as they come, and I'm freed by my decree to marry. I'm no more married than you are." He took a step toward her, but Cis held out both hands, warding him off.

"She is alive. Don't touch me!" she cried. "She is alive. No decree kills her; your wife is alive," she gasped.

"Cis, listen to me!" Rodney began, dropping on his knees beside Cicely, compelling her horror-stricken eyes to meet his eyes. "That girl was not fit to be any man's wife. Do you understand? My marriage was a mockery from the first, and soon I hated her as much as I had been fascinated by her. From sly, hidden beginnings, she soon passed into open evil. She disgraced me while I was her husband, and since I have been free of her she has gone into utter degradation. There was not an instant's question of my getting rid of her; court and common humanity would grant me my decree of divorce. Are you going to tell me that I have a living wife? I have no wife. Would you make all my life desolate because she was what she was? Only the Catholic Church forbids marriage under my conditions. Do you see now why I want you to

shake off her laws, which do violence to every natural instinct of justice? Am I to suffer, live alone, denied wife and children? *I* suffer, who was not the offender? Is that sense? Plain common sense forbids such foolishness. Throw off your prejudices; come out into freedom and happiness, my darling! Only your ridiculous Roman Catholic tyrants forbid it; God is on our side, not they! The reverend mayor, or a reverend alderman can marry us as tight and as sacredly as that thin Jesuit can whom we met coming back from Pioneer Falls that Sunday. You're not actually a Catholic. Cis, I've suffered enough. Make it up to me! With you my wife there won't be a scar left of these wicked wounds! Cis, don't you love me? Stop staring at me so, as if you'd never seen me before! Cis, don't you know I'm Rory O'Moore, unchanged? That this is our home, and you my Holly-bride?"

Cis did not move. She stared at Rodney stonily, trying to force her mind to grasp this thing that had fallen upon her when her happiness was at its height, made sweeter and holier than before by her new sense of the meaning of home-making.

"Was this woman—your wife—was she a Catholic?" Cis managed to ask.

"Well, I've no love for the Catholic Church, but I wouldn't wish her on any Church," Rodney laughed bitterly. "Religion wasn't in her line, but her people were Catholic; she'd had baptism."

"You knew that, because you were married by a priest," Cicely groped in her mind for what she

wanted to say. "They ask—about baptism. You were married by a priest?"

"Yes. But, good heavens, Cis—" Rodney cried out. "What of that? These things have no power over us unless we give them the right to it. Priest or no priest, the laws of our country freed me; isn't that enough?"

"You have a living wife." Cis repeated the words, changing her formula, but clinging to the sole idea that took shape in her stunned brain.

"Cicely, Cis, my Holly, don't, don't, for the love of justice, for the love of me, benumb yourself with such idiocy! I have no wife! Cis, listen! *I—have —no—wife!* Will you leave me?" Rodney cried, leaping to his feet, for Cis had risen. "You can't! Throw over the Church! Come to me! You love me; I worship you. I need you. Cis, are you utterly heartless? Church or me, and you hesitate! Me, your husband! Oh, Cis, look at this home of ours; stay in it!"

Cis lifted both arms toward heaven with a great, tragic gesture, and turned in silence toward the door. Rodney leaped to reach it before her, but she raised her hand and looked at him. Her blanched face, surmounted by her glowing hair was deathlike and awful; it made Rodney fall back to let her pass, afraid to check her.

"I will go away to think. I can't think now. I will send you word when I know. I may come back. I cannot think. You have killed my brain. I don't know—but you have a living wife! I will go away to think. Let me go, alone. I must go—

alone. There is not even Cis Adair left to go with me. How strange to come alive and go out dead! Your wife is alive. Good-bye. Let me pass."

Cis spoke slowly, with great difficulty, yet clearly, and Rodney, awed and conscience-stricken to see her thus, fell back and let her go. Afterward he marvelled that he had done so, and cursed his folly, but under the spell of Cicely's eyes he could not do otherwise.

CHAPTER XIII

DARKNESS

CICELY came out into the golden weather of that belated St. Martin's Summer day which she had said had been sent to bless her path to her new home. The sunshine was as warm, the air as soft, the sky as beautifully blue as when she had crossed the threshold of her paradise, from which horror and her stumbling conscience were driving her, but she saw nothing of the beauty around her.

Shut into her own mind, she walked unseeing, unaware, the interior darkness not lifting even so much as to reveal to her what and why she suffered. Or did she suffer? Something had happened to her; everything was obliterated; pain was not conscious to her, nor loss, but in a vacuum that forbade breath, in a pit without ray or exit, she walked the Beaconhite streets, not knowing where she went, nor whom she passed. Something repeated ceaselessly: "A wife. A wife, alive; he has a wife. He is married." She did not know why she so insisted upon this; it tired her, and many men had a wife. Who was it that had one whose having one so mattered to her?

She could not think; she must think. That was it; she must think. Never before had she felt the need of thinking, but there was something that she must

think out. What it was, or why she must think about it, she could not tell, but the immediate, pressing necessity was to think; she must find a place to think in. Not her own room at Mrs. Wallace's; she would not go there. The park? That might do, though she would like to go where no one could come near her, and the park would be full of strollers on such a Sunday as this. Solitude, a place to think, to gather up vague horrors which were lurking at the back of her brain, waiting to be assembled into definite agony. Cis dimly felt that agony was upon her, beginning, yet almost it would be better than this strange bewilderment which held for her but two cogent impressions. They rose up out of her chaos like spars of a shipwreck: Someone, Rodney Moore—but she could not quite grasp who Rodney Moore was, why his affairs affected her—had a living wife. And she must find solitude and think; there was something that she must clearly see, upon which she must decide.

She turned the corner of a street, going on aimlessly. The church had not occurred to her as a quiet place in which she could think, still less did it occur to poor Cicely, who had few of the habits of devotion, to seek the church for enlightenment. guidance, strength. She had never formed the custom of making visits to the church, so now, bewildered, benumbed, there was no deep-seated instinct to lead her thither when her brain was not directing her steps. Yet before her, as she came down this street into which she had turned, stood the church of St. Francis Xavier, the church to which

she repaired nearly every week for her compulsory Mass of Sunday.

"That ought to be a quiet place," Cis told herself, and ascended the church steps. It was a large church, fine in architecture, not tasteful in decoration. It was much too strong-colored, too bizarre in the designs of its interior, yet it contrived to get an effect of splendor, in spite of its offenses against the canons of art, and it needed no contriving to give an instant sense of cheerfulness, of homelikeness, of kindness, and, withal, of devotion to those who entered it.

There were but few people in it at this hour, when dinner and the companionship of the weekly holiday occupied most of its frequenters. Those who were there were kneeling at the farther end of the deep building, before the shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes, or the Sacred Heart altar, or before the Piéta that stood near the sanctuary rail, just within it. A half dozen, or less, knelt before the candelabrum which held the votive candles; they had each lighted one, and were praying wraptly that the boon which they implored by whispered prayer and representative little candle might be granted.

Cis went into a pew close to the door, and from habit, but without consciousness of her action, knelt and made the sign of the cross because she had just come into church. She had long ago fallen into the way of thus kneeling on entering, and, first of all prayers, repeating the Act of Contrition.

Now she began slowly, without knowing what she said, to whisper: "In the Name of the Father, and

of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. O my God, I am heartily sorry that—" Her lips ceased moving; she could go no farther. Heartily sorry—for what?

Rodney Moore had a living wife; he was unhappy about it. So was she. She was sorry that this was so. There was that nice apartment which he had shown her, and those chairs; one was the chair for the lady of the house. What hurt her so? Was it her head? It did not seem to her that she had brought it with her, yet she felt a terrible pain; it seemed to be in her head. What was it she had to think about? Rodney was not dead. Why did she feel as though he were dead? Or was it that there was no Rodney? He had a wife, alive. He had none, so he had said, but if she were alive? He must have forgotten, poor Rodney, that when one's wife is alive—there she is: alive! Still the wife. She was not thinking, and she had come here to think; it was quiet, deeply, peacefully quiet, and somehow quieting, as well. She would be able to think here.

Cis knelt staring at the altar, her face so white that an old woman, entering, turned as if to speak to her, then changed her mind and went on, shaking her head pityingly, saying to herself: "God pity and help her, the poor young creature!" as she ducked her edition of a genuflection toward the altar and knelt in a pew, rattling big brown rosary beads, supplemented by several large medals, on the back of the pew against which she rested her gnarled hands.

Was it that the benison was effective? It was not

long before the strange submergence of her conscious self which had overwhelmed Cicely on hearing Rodney's knell of her joy, broke and rolled back, leaving her soul bare to an agony that saw only too clearly, grasped only too acutely exactly what had befallen her.

She was promised to marry within four weeks a man whose wife was still alive!

Under the law of the country Rodney was entirely free. It was the woman, not he, who had broken the marriage vow, who had desecrated the marriage, sinned against herself, against Rodney, against God. No one would ask a man to condone her sin, unrepented, persisted in. The state issued licenses to marry; it protected the legality of marriage; under its laws children were made legitimate, their rights protected; marriage was a civil institution, the foundation of decent living, of homes which were the unit of the state; it was essentially the bulwark of civilization. When it ceased to be the foundation of decent living, when the sin of a parent endangered the legitimacy of children, when the home was corrupted, the yoke become a galling chain, even disgrace, then the state, which had approved the union and licensed it under its laws, revoked it, dissolved it, allowing the innocent partner of the union to go free, to make another marriage if he, or she, so desired; be perfectly free to enjoy the rights of every citizen, "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

If there were states which went so far as to allow equal privileges to the guilty spouse; which gave to

one who had debased one marriage, freedom to contract another, or even others, that was all wrong, of course, but that consideration was uncalled for in this case. Rodney was wronged; he had been made free of the person who had wrecked his happiness, and that was just.

Ah, but what was this, this other side to the divorce question? The teaching of Christ Himself, of His Church, continuing His teaching, practising it, though it bore ever so heavily upon a case peculiarly putting forth pleas for its exception; holding it irrefrangible though it cost a kingdom, and plunged a whole noble and religious nation into heresy?

Cicely's mind was as keenly awake now as it had been benumbed at first. Teaching that she had heard without realization of hearing it, came to life, stored up within that memory which is one of the soul's component parts.

The Church's laws were not flexible on fundamental questions; they were made for all, and whether they were brought to bear upon a case which seemed to deserve the severity of their full application, or whether—as now—they seemed too cruel, they admitted no indulgence. Rodney Moore had married a girl who was baptized in the Catholic Church, as was he. He had married unwisely, from unworthy motives, but that did not lessen the guilt of the wife who had betrayed him. The Church would not insist that the union of marriage be maintained in such a case as this, but Rodney and his wife had spoken the vow which precludes the

taking of another man or woman in espousal till death has ended the duration of that vow. The state could annul the civil marriage which it had made, but far beyond its province lay the sacramental marriage, so far beyond it that not even the Church, with its divinely delegated authority to bind and to loose could annul a marriage to which there was no impediment according to her laws; performed by her authority under God; vowed to God directly; sealed by her sacramental seal which cannot be broken till death has broken it.

This knowledge of the Church's position as to marriage came clearly before Cicely's mind as she knelt, her eyes fixed upon the altar, which she did not see. With such vivid remembrance of what she had been taught by sermons, by reading, by acquaintance with Catholics like the Dowling family, whose talk on divorce she had heard and shared, for it is a subject that no modern American can escape, Cis marshalled the facts of the Catholic Church's attitude toward divorce. She had heard words which returned to her, and she knew who it was that had uttered them. "For this cause shall a man leave father and mother and shall cleave to his wife; and they two shall be as one flesh. And he that shall marry her that is put away committeth adultery."

Strange that she should remember this! Cis wondered at it; she could not ordinarily repeat texts. There was no divorce, not within the Church. Cicely knew now why she had repeated wearily those horrible words: "He has a living wife."

Rodney had a living wife, and while she lived Cicely Adair could not be his wife, however wicked his wife had been—not in the eyes of the Catholic Church!

There was the crux of the matter. In the eyes of the state, of the average American society, Cicely Adair, and still another after her, might be Rodney Moore's wife for all his first misadventure!

Rodney implored her to come out of the Church into freedom. Ah, yes, and more, far, far more—into his arms, into his home, into that lovable, cheery, blessed little apartment waiting for them!

She had but to go to him, tell him that she was ready, that she would leave all to follow him—She checked herself; even in her thoughts she could not travesty the divine words which related to marriage, but to the sacrament of marriage. Not to leave Him did Our Lord bid His followers leave all to cling to a wife, but rather to come after Him and, thus coming, derive strength to cleave to one spouse in a union transcending the weakness of nature.

Back upon its track Cicely's mind travelled, leaving the thought of Our Lord's teaching. Rodney bade her prove her love for him. He had reminded her of how indifferent a Catholic she was. It was true. She rarely thought about her faith; it did not form an integral, vital part of her days. She kept to it, but she did not enjoy it, nor did she often draw near to its heart, nor know much about its devotions, live in its calendar year. She dimly knew that some people did these things; Nan came nearer

to it than Cis realized, she imagined, but as a rule these things seemed to be fit for nuns.

She need never take a definite step, like renouncing her faith overtly. All that she had to do was to marry Rodney. She would have to be married by a civil officer, or a minister; no priest could marry her, of course, and that would put her outside the Church. After that she would go into her own home, and live her life of complete devotion to Rodney. If she had children she would widen out to embrace them in her heart, but Rodney first! Always, always Rodney first! She—they—could teach their children to be upright, kind, good citizens, good moral men and women. Rodney said it was ridiculous to delude yourself into thinking that more than this was needed, or that anyone really knew anything more about life and death than that a man must live in the world decently, and then when he died, if there was anything more for him, he'd be sure to get the good coming to him, because he had not made the world a worse place for anyone else. And if there were nothing beyond but a long, dreamless sleep, and pretty flowers springing out of your ashes—well! Then that's all there was of it, and you would have played your part creditably and gone out leaving an honored name.

Cecily saw Rod's handsome, laughing face in her memory as it had looked when he had said this, and she heard his jolly, infectious laugh! Oh, how she wanted him, *wanted* him! The longing for him swept over her like physical sickness, and she shuddered, turning cold. She had left him miserable:

she had deserted him. Deserted him in the home he was making for her; she was wrecking his home a second time as that other woman had wrecked his first home. She, Cis, was respectable in the eyes of the world, and that other was not, but was she any better than the outcast?

Cicely raised her ring to her lips and kissed over and over again its glowing ruby. "The color of her love, of the warm blood of her great heart," Rod had told her the ruby was. And she had been cold-hearted toward him, had failed him when he trusted her. He might have deceived her, have married her and not told her till afterward. How splendid he was to be truthful, honorable toward her! Should she punish him for his virtues? Even a child is told that if it tells the truth it shall not be punished, but how cruelly, how wickedly she was punishing Rod, Rory O'Moore!

She would go to him and beg his forgiveness; he would forgive her, remembering that she, too, had suffered, that his secret had shocked her beyond the power to think at first; Rod was always big, and kind.

She would marry him. Even though a magistrate married her and by so doing expelled her from Catholic communion she would marry him. Excommunicated! It did sound fearful! But words did not matter! She would not strike Rodney in the face, drive him from her with a blow upon his heart!

Cicely's eyes, fixed upon the altar, unseeing, their gaze turned inward, suddenly saw. Her gaze turned

outward, and she saw the small golden door upon which her set eyes had been resting, saw it, and saw the crucifix above it, a tall, vivid crucifix over the tabernacle door, under the tabernacle dome. And suddenly Cicely began to tremble violently and her icy hands clutched at the back of the pew before her.

Who, then, would she strike in the Face? Upon Whose Sacred Heart would she deal the blow which drove Him from her?

Never again should she see that golden door open and her Lord come forth to her. Never again would a priest turn to her and bid her "Behold the Lamb of God." Seldom, ah, seldom did she let the words be addressed to her now, but—never again? Excommunicated?

She was a poor Catholic, cold, indifferent, ignorant, but she was a Catholic. She had held to her Faith, after a fashion, and she had known that she could never substitute another faith for it. For Rodney's sake she would leave it, go to him, go from God! She would heal Rodney's wounds, but she would join the rabble in the Garden, and betray her Lord! She would not kiss Him, as Judas had kissed Him, but she would kiss in bridal kiss the man whose acceptance meant her Lord's rejection.

Rodney, or her Lord? One or the other; never both. She had not thought just what it meant, this decision which she had reached upon a flood of human longing and love. She wanted Rodney. She craved for him as the body craves for food, the parched throat for water; she agonized remember-

ing his present pain, that she had inflicted it in return for his honorable dealing with her.

But now—she saw the Tabernacle. With her soul she saw it, and she felt by prescience the desolation of the closing of its door, sealed by her own action. To be an outcast, excommunicated!

Her mind, her torture could go no farther. In that throe her soul was born, but she could endure no more.

How long she had knelt in the church she had no idea; she took no cognizance of her body, of its strained position upon the knees on the narrow kneeling-rest. It was growing dusk in the church; she must have been there long. There were more people moving up and down the aisles, and before the shrines; several were making the stations, some coming down the middle aisle, others going toward the high altar. Cicely saw none of these.

She swayed on her tired knees, her aching spine no longer supporting her, and she crumpled up sidewise, falling over the back of the pew upon which her arms had rested, her head upon them in such wise that no one noticed that she had fainted. Father Morley had come out through the sanctuary, into the church, summoned by the little electric bell, its button placed under the rail, near the votive-lights candelabrum. It called a priest of that Community to hear a confession when a priest was needed at another time than the regular days and hours upon which confessions were heard.

A man had gone into the confessional when Father Morley took his place in the centre, and had

kissed and assumed the narrow stole which had hung across the door. The penitent took long, so long that some of the pious women kneeling at the side altars were interested in his case, and watched to see him emerge, speculating on the nature of his story; some of them said a little prayer for him that he would "come out all right," for good women are always intensely interested in the reform of a possibly bad man.

At last the absolution had been given, the penitent lingered for a final question or two and Father Morley's answers, then he departed to say his penance and pray his prayers before the great Piéta—which the interested pious women thought symptomatic.

Father Morley folded his narrow stole, hung it again on the confessional door, and came out, closing the low door carefully and noiselessly behind him. He came down the fast darkening church, walking with his long, easy stride, peering into the pews as he passed with his near-sighted gaze, looking vainly for a small book which he had lent to someone, and which that someone had telephoned him to say that she had left in a pew in the main aisle of the church, instead of returning it to the lay-brother at the house door, as she had set out to do.

Thus Father Morley came up to Cicely as she lay, fallen over the pew back, held up from a complete fall by her arms across the back of the pew in front of her, and her back wedged against the pew in which she had knelt.

"My daughter, are you ill?" asked the priest, pausing at Cicely's side. As she did not answer, nor move, he bent down and touched her. Then he looked startled and turned her face toward him, lifting her slightly as he did so. "Cicely Adair!" he exclaimed aloud, instantly recognizing her, and remembering the name which she had given him. "My child, can you hear me? Are you ill?"

The easing of her position, her raised head, brought Cicely to part consciousness. With the help of Father Morley's hands, supporting her beneath her arms, she got upon her feet, looking at him dazed, white, staring.

"Come out into the air, my dear," said the Jesuit gently. "You are suffering. It is not bodily sickness, my poor girl! Let me help you out. Here, my hand under your elbow, so! That's better. Now slowly; courage! Come into the pure, good air, Cicely Adair!"

He led Cicely slowly and carefully out of the church, down the steps, through a small gate beside them, into a grassy yard.

"This is not cloister," Father Morley said. "Our parochial school children's playground. Sit here, my child, on this bench. There is a bell; I'll ring for Brother Feely to bring you a cup of coffee and a few biscuits. Don't try to speak; you can tell me what you will later."

A lay-brother with a pale, patient face, and hair as red as Cicely's own, came in response to Father Morley's call, and quickly returned with a cup of

the steaming beverage, and a few thin sweet biscuits on a plain white plate.

"Sip this, my daughter," said the Jesuit, with his benignant smile; "you are exhausted."

Cicely gratefully drank of the coffee, and revived as it coursed through her chilled body. She sat up after she had eaten and drank, and tried to smile at the priest. "You are very kind, Father Morley," she said. "I must go. Thank you."

"Without giving me something in return?" hinted Father Morley. "Aren't you going to give me a wee bit of your confidence? What has gone wrong with you, my child?"

Cicely looked long into the steady, keen, sad, kindly eyes looking down into hers. She did not want to speak, but, characteristically, spoke the truth when she felt compelled to speak.

"I'm shocked by what I've found out to-day," she said. "I've got to decide something. I may leave the Church; I don't know. It's that, or hurt someone dearer to me than my life."

She waited for an explosion of protest from the Jesuit, but none came. Instead he said quietly: "Not much comparison, is there, between hurting a human being, and losing Almighty God, betraying your Master and damning your soul! But no one should decide a great matter hastily; you've felt this is the greatest of great matters, I see. That's something. You couldn't marry a man who had a living wife; all your decent Catholic womanhood, as well as your religion, is against it."

Cicely sprang to her feet.

"Father Morley, how could you know?" she gasped.

"Not hard to guess. I've been a priest, hearing confessions these twenty-five years, my child. Only an insuperable obstacle to your marriage could present to you the alternative you described. You never will call yourself any man's wife, when you know you are not a wife," replied Father Morley. "But this is no time to talk; you're tired, and I dine in a short time. Think of it over night; 'the night brings counsel,' and pray to the Holy Spirit. You'll not go home to your lonely struggle, of course; that would never do. I'm going to send you to Miss Miriam Braithwaite for to-night. She is an elderly woman; the cleverest, most entertaining person imaginable, but, what is far more important, she comes near to being a saint underneath her disguise of it! She is my great friend and reliance. Once more I summon Brother Feely, and he will telephone Miss Braithwaite, and she will drive over for you. You'll enjoy your visit."

Father Morley made no opening for demur on Cicely's part, but she tried to make one.

"Father, I don't know her! Oh, no! I can't go! I'm going home," she cried.

"You'll meet Miss Braithwaite within fifteen minutes, and know her within twenty minutes," declared Father Morley, with a slight wave of the hand that dissipated Cicely's attempt to resist him.

He called Brother Feely, and bade him telephone Miss Braithwaite.

"Tell her I want to send Miss Cicely Adair to her

for the night. She is worn out, tell her; a thoroughly good girl, whom she will like. Ask her to come over after her as soon as she can, please; Miss Adair is needing rest."

Cis sank back, unable to object; indeed she found this arrangement something of a relief. She dreaded a night alone in her room, and dreaded what she knew would lie before her, an interview with Rodney which would be beyond her strength. It was only much later that she realized that Father Morley had foreseen the same thing, and prevented it. He had the priest's intuition which enabled him to know a great deal that he had not been told.

CHAPTER XIV

INDECISION

CICELY waited the coming of her yet unknown hostess without much interest in the arrangement which Father Morley had not only made for her, but, so to speak, had carried by assault. She was so utterly tired in body and mind, so prostrated by the intensity with which she had been feeling for the past hours that the ability to feel was, for the time, burned out of her.

She sat back against the garden bench, resting sidewise so that her arm lay across its back; her head drooped forward on her shoulder, waiting quiescent for Miss Braithwaite to come to fetch her away.

Father Morley waited with her, but he did not speak to her. He paced the grass slowly, his open breviary in his hand, his lips moving as he read each syllable of the sonorous Latin, not slighting it, but dwelling on its beauties, now that he had time to read it leisurely.

Cicely lightly dozed as she waited, falling into the half-submerged, half-conscious sleep of a sick person; she was spent with excess of emotion.

She did not have long to wait, however. Miss Braithwaite evidently was accustomed to sudden

summons from Father Morley, and to responding to them without demur, nor question as to what he asked of her. She told Cis later that "when it came to a call from Father Morley she was always prepared for the worst."

Now she stopped her coupé at the gate beyond the schoolyard's high wall which shut the road from view. Cis did not arouse to hear her, but Father Morley heard the soft purr of her engine; its cessation and the slight jar of her brake; shifted a ribbon in his breviary to mark the place at which he stopped reading, closed his book and went toward the gate to welcome his adjutant.

"Lost, strayed or stolen?" Miss Braithwaite thus asked of the Jesuit a statement of the present case upon which he had called her.

"Neither—yet. Liable to stray, and finally to be lost. Badly strained by a contest in which she is neither victor nor vanquished, so far. You're to take her home and arm her anew, as well as to treat her wounds; hospital case. Interesting and valuable material," murmured the priest, turning back toward Cicely.

She aroused at the sound of their voices. Miss Braithwaite had nodded comprehendingly to Father Morley's summing up, and had said aloud:

"I nearly ran over a child coming here! Little sinner ran directly before my wheels after he had almost reached the curbstone, and I had made sure that I might safely go ahead! I do wish, even if people don't highly value their children, that they would keep them out of the road. It's most un-

pleasant to run one down! This bold buccaneer was about three years old, I fancy."

Cicely sat up and dropped her hands into her lap, staring at Miss Braithwaite. She saw a small person who, at first glimpse, gave the impression of being topped by a head out of proportion to her height, but this was due to the remarkable cast of her countenance, not to the fact. She had a broad, noble brow; keen, dark eyes, deep-set and not large, but so alive, so flashing and penetrating that they held anyone's attention who saw them for the first time. Her nose was well-cut, somewhat large, thin, with a high arch, and her lips were strongly defined, the upper one meeting the lower one in a central point. It was the mouth of a person not unsweet, but not given to what might be called professional sweetness; her chin was square-cut, and it lifted in a decided way as she talked. Her voice penetrated Cicely's consciousness before she fully saw her, a voice of the highest cultivation, used without the least taint of affectation; neither low nor high, with pleasant, throaty notes, yet with a resonance that made it insistent, even at a distance. She spoke every syllable clearly; beautiful English pronunciation, with inflections suggestive of Italian, speech so delightful that, though Cis was in no condition to get pleasure from it, it did enter her tired brain soothingly, and it drew her to the woman who was coming toward her with a friendly smile and a penetrating look.

"Miss Braithwaite, this is Miss Cicely Adair. Cicely, my child, this is Miss Miriam Braithwaite.

The most that I shall tell you of her is that she is the best prescription in my pharmacopœia; you'll have plenty of occupation in finding out just how the prescription acts. Cicely Adair is not happy, Miss Braithwaite; not fit to go to her boarding place alone to-night; she needs mothering. I've told her that you would take her home with you and put her to sleep in one of your spacious rooms," said Father Morley.

Cicely arose, not quite steadily, and put her cold hand into Miss Braithwaite's hand, which took it into a warm clasp.

"My dear, Father Morley has great confidence in the most single of single ladies to impute to her mothering qualities, now hasn't he? But I'll be delighted to have you with me to-night; my maid is away, and I'm scandalously dependent upon her; not for service; for companionship! So if you'll let me have your youth near me to-night it will be most opportune and welcome," said the little lady, whose whole effect made absurd the idea of her being dependent upon anything created.

"Thank you, Miss Braithwaite," said Cis. "I'm not sure I ought to go; I ought not to bother a perfect stranger, but Father—"

"Perfect stranger! When we have the same Father? God, to be sure, but also Father Morley!" cried Miss Braithwaite. "Why, we're sisters; you're my little sister! Let me whisper to you, my dear; Father Morley must not hear, though he's not at all deaf. Father Morley looks mild; perhaps not too strong, but he's an out-and-out tyrant! I do every-

thing he tells me to, nervously, on the bidding, lest he fall upon me and flay me! Of course you let him arrange everything for you; so did I when he had me called to fetch you! But it's an all around good arrangement, we have to acknowledge that. He's a beneficent tyrant; likely would behead you if you disobeyed him, but puts into your head things to do that make you better enjoy having a head."

Cicely smiled faintly, and turned to the priest with the suggestion of dawning ease and affection which this sort of talk was admirably adapted to awaken. She also felt singularly at home with this brilliant little woman, with the eyes that saw through one, the nose of a general, the lips and voice and hand of a generous soul.

"Father Morley is very good to me; so are you," she said simply.

"Then shall we go home immediately and begin to rest you, my dear?" asked Miss Braithwaite, taking Cicely's hand with a strong, yet gently persuasive grasp and turning toward the gate again.

Father Morley walked beside Cis, bending his head toward her, not speaking, but as if he were communing with her without words.

"Good night, my child," he said when they had reached the gate. "I will not see you before eleven to-morrow; you will need to sleep late. After your first sleep you may waken for awhile, and then you will sleep into the morning. Miss Braithwaite will be within call; if you find yourself waking, summon her."

The wise priest well knew the greater likelihood of complete confidence in the night, rather than the day.

"I will see you at eleven. If Cicely Adair is able to come here, bring her to me, please, Miss Braithwaite. If not, call me up and I will go to see her at your house."

"Do you want to see me, Father Morley? But there is the office; I must be at the office by half past nine anyway," said Cis.

"Call Mr. Lucas, and tell him, what is strictly true, that you are not able to report for duty tomorrow. I would tell him for you, but that an explanation from me would bias him against your absence so powerfully that he'd rather send an officer to hale you to his office than permit your staying away." Father Morley laughed, a quietly amused, inward laugh of enjoyment.

"Lucas? Wilmer Lucas? Oh, I'll attend to that!" cried Miss Braithwaite. "He and I clasp hands, in spite of the Roman shackles on mine. He knows that my grandfather was intensely Protestant, and he allows me a slight latitude for the sake of his honored memory. We often meet in Beaconhite affairs, and he regards me as a good citizen, which also helps to fumigate me! He owes me several small debts for favors received. I'll call him up and tell him that I have his bright-haired secretary—are you his secretary? I didn't know—in my keeping and will return her when she is better. Then Miss Adair will come to you at eleven, Father, unless I

call you up. Good night, Father Morley. Thank you for giving me a companion for to-night."

Father Morley opened the gate for them, and took Cicely's hand in his, holding the gate open with his left hand.

"Good night, my child," he said gently. "May God have you in His keeping, and do you hold Him tight, keeping to Him. Only say in your heart: 'God help me!' and it is done! No fear of failure, wrapped around in His light and His might!"

Cis bowed her head instinctively to receive the blessing which this wonderful man gave to her, his face tender and pitiful, grave yet triumphant, as he feared for her, yet confidently hoped that she would let God have His way with her at last.

Miss Braithwaite put Cicely into her car and followed her, placing herself behind the wheel, liberating the brake and setting the engine running.

"Good-bye, Father," she said. "Send St. Michael around to my house to watch over us through the night after you've said your night prayers, please. Thank you for letting me have this Cicely Adair."

Miss Braithwaite drove steadily, swinging into a fifteen miles an hour speed, and varying it but slightly as she turned from street to street, and struck out to a side of the city which Cis did not know well. There were dignified houses along the way, their grounds increasing in extent, their trees getting more abundant and taller as the coupé carried them farther from the street of the Jesuit church. Miss Braithwaite did not attempt to talk

as she drove, and Cis lay back restfully against the grey corduroy upholstery, finding it grateful to be in motion, borne, she did not know whither, without effort or responsibility on her part. Miss Braithwaite turned into the broad gateway of one of the finest houses which Cis had seen, and drew up before the entrance to the house, having traversed a long, shaded driveway.

"Here we are, Miss Adair, at home quite safe and sound. I'm vain of driving, because they say it's hard to teach an old dog new tricks and I learned only last year. I don't do the idiot things men attribute to women drivers. Jump out, my dear, and tell yourself you're coming home. You haven't forgotten how to play house, have you? My man will come to take the car around to the garage. Come into the library; there'll be a log fire on the hearth there. Here we are! Ah, I love to come home!" Miss Braithwaite, talking cheerfully, led the way across and half way down a great entrance hall. She threw open one of a pair of doors, letting Cis precede her into a high-ceiled, wainscoted room, with high book shelves built around it, bronzes and beautiful marbles on their tops, shadowy pictures above them, a glorious fire of three-foot logs glowing lazily on the hearth, its light playing over the bindings of the three thousand or more books which ranged every side of the room, except the space occupied by the fireplace.

"Oh!" exclaimed Cis. "How beautiful!"

"That's right! You must love this room or there's no saying how violently we may quarrel be-

fore the night is over," said Miss Braithwaite, pulling up a deeply upholstered semicircular chair before the fire, and gently pushing Cicely into it. "I'm so fond of this room that I'm debating how to get a bill before the legislature to give me more hours in the day to sit in it. I'm a busy woman, my dear, and sometimes I think I'm that old person in Mother Goose who 'scarce ever was quiet.' I hope one of these days to make myself a visit, spend a week quietly browsing beside this fire! My grandfather built the house, and began the library; my father added to them both. I've added only to the library, but isn't it nice? Throw your hat and coat over on that straight inglenook chair, and lie back and watch the flames. Would you like to poke up the fire? It's a harmless passion, but it takes strong hold of one! Take this poker and let air get between the logs; it's great fun! We will have supper in here, beside the fire, and play we're in a mountain camp. Do you make believe? It keeps one going, I assure you. I wouldn't dare let sensible people know what silly things I do! I'm supposed to be a dignified, executive, getting-elderly lady! But you look much too nice to be sensible! I think I like you, my dear. Hair like yours is enough to warm up the first liking! It is glorious, child! Then your name—Cicely Adair! Might be one of the seven sweet symphonic names in 'The Blessed Damosel'!"

Miss Braithwaite had chatted on, precluding the awkwardness of Cicely's entrance into a strange house, the guest of an entire stranger.

Miss Braithwaite was supremely indifferent to the effect of her charm, but she could not help knowing that she had the gift of winning to her anyone toward whom she elected to put forth her powers to please. She had travelled far and lived long in Europe; had read all her life; was a gracious, vivacious hostess; had moved in the best society, the truly fine society of her own land and England, and, though not beautiful as a young woman, had been one whom all men honored, admired, and whom many had sought to wed. Her mind was brilliant and—a rarer quality in a woman's—was logical, with a true sense of justice and proportion. She was one whom only infinity could satisfy, and, becoming a convert to the Catholic Church before her thirtieth year, she had given over her great gifts to its service, was a factor in its work, showing it to many another, making her house, her wealth, her gifted self its consecrated tools. The priests used her for work which the women garbed in religious habits could do less well, which they themselves could not always compass. Her house had become a sort of perpetual salon; to it repaired people from distant cities; in it were organized many movements for good, and in Miriam Braithwaite the Church had a daughter whose mere existence sufficiently refuted slander against the Church, since she could neither be deluded, nor tolerate anything less than the noblest.

Now Cis, worn and terror-stricken, unable to feel with the keenness of some hours earlier, yet below her congealed surfaces reaching out after Rodney,

turning to him, pitying him, hungering for him, discerned in Miss Braithwaite the qualities which were hers so supremely, and began to lean out to her with a blind desire to get from her what was hers to give.

"Please call me 'Cis'—that's what I'm called—'Cicely,' if you like it better," Cis said. "I think I ought to tell you all about myself."

"Surely!" Miss Braithwaite agreed cordially. "Do you know anything so fine as to have someone trust you enough to confide in you? But supper first, my dear! I'll ring for it, and we'll eat here, as warm and cozy as two ladybugs. I hope you're not too young to care about tea?"

"Twenty-two," said Cis, with a tiny smile.

"Well, that's true, what you imply!" cried Miss Braithwaite, rising to touch a bell. "It's not the years, but the palate. Tea is the most refreshingly restorative thing I know. Ah, Ellen," she added as a maid entered. "Will you serve us supper here? Miss Adair is staying with me. Let us have the cold chicken, lettuce, small biscuits; the cream cheese, tea—without cream? Now that's a sensible girl, Cicely!—fruit punch, with considerable grape fruit in it, and a dash of the claret; cake, the white cake, not the solid one. Perhaps that's all; perhaps not. It will do to begin with. Place the table there, Ellen, please; push away the couch. And will you please bring the roses from the dining room?"

Cis was amazed to find herself enjoying this supper, served beautifully by the quiet-footed, deft

Ellen, before the deep red glow of the smouldering logs. She ate heartily, and lay back in her low, cozy chair afterward, feeling better able to cope with life. But with the return of strength, came the revival of her longing for Rodney, the conviction that, cost what it would, she must return to him. "Now I must tell you, please," Cis said to Miss Braithwaite, and she replied: "Now you may. It is better to tell me before you try to sleep."

She sat without looking at Cis, shading her face with her hand, which was one of strong individuality, rather than actual beauty; not speaking, but giving the impression of absorbed attention to the history which Cicely was giving her. She briefly passed over her early phases, amply telling Miss Braithwaite her pitiful love story. "And now I must decide," she ended. "Rodney or the Church. It's not fair, aside from anything else, to leave him when he was so truthful to me. But I want him! I must go to him! I left him in our home, alone! When I was in the church I thought, perhaps, I'd stick to the Catholic Church, but no, no, no! Telling you about him has made me see. It must be Rodney; I'm his wife. See, that's his ring, made for me, Miss Braithwaite."

"Yes, dear," said Miss Braithwaite quietly. "A ruby. The Church wears red on the festivals of her martyrs. How good God is to you, how He loves you! In choosing Him you will save the poor fellow whom you love, but whom God loves more, my Cicely! Your sacrifice will bring Rodney back at last. Don't you know that is the way these miracles

are wrought? How fine that it was such as you whom Rodney loved when he was an outcast from God! It might so easily have been a weak girl who did not love Rodney truly, tremendously, as you can, as you do, and so who would have renounced her Faith; sealed Rodney's doom; gone with him into sin, degradation, the awful hatred of each other which waits upon those who debase love. With a living wife Rodney cannot marry. Cis, dear, you are not really hesitating! You are not going into that horrible abyss. It is only your torn heart crying out, but your will is God's. Little Cicely, be glad that you can suffer for Our Lord. It is He Who stands between you and the breaking of His unmistakable law. He is going to bring Rodney back because you will ask it, who have offered Him the sacrifice of a broken heart. Don't let yourself imagine that you are hesitating in your loyalty to Our Lord! Fancy, turning Our Lord out of your life for the sake of anyone, or everyone whom He has made! Wouldn't it be a lonely world, dear, if we drove out of it that great white Figure which towers above us, just before us at every step? Cicely Adair to say: 'Go away from me, Lord Jesus, with Your wounds and beauty! With Your love, beyond anything that I can mean by love!' Unthinkable, child! Come now, dear one; come to bed. Sleep and rest, for never, never will you be a traitor, betray your Lord. We won't talk longer to-night. You're nearly exhausted again. I'll put you to bed, child, and thank you for letting me shelter someone who wears a ring of the martyr color, and is going

to suffer to the end for loyalty to Our Lord Who died for her—and me!"

Miss Braithwaite had gone on at length, for Cicely was sitting erect, wide-eyed, her face changing as she listened, and Miss Braithwaite knew that she was winning her to great heroism. It was not the first time that Miriam Braithwaite had fought and won a like battle for the right.

"Ah, don't, don't! I can't!" Cicely cried, but she arose and threw herself on her knees before Miss Braithwaite, clasping her tight, shaking with sobs which brought no tears; broken, weak, yet with a dawning strength.

Miss Braithwaite helped Cicely to her bed, brushed and plaited her abundant hair; it fell around the girl in red masses of glory. Then she put Cicely between fragrant sheets, switched off the strong lights, switched on a low reading lamp, its hooded screen turned toward herself, dark toward the bed, and began to read the story of the Passion from St. Matthew's Gospel. "She cannot deny her Lord in the morning if she sleeps with this in her ears," Miss Braithwaite thought, reading in her beautifully modulated voice the infinite pathos of those selfless hours.

Cicely slept deeply, wakening but once, and then not to lie awake as Father Morley had foreseen her doing, but falling off again into the profound sleep of complete exhaustion.

She arose in the morning steadier in nerves; the first poignancy of her agony laid for the moment, but sure to leap up again to tear at her.

After a delicious breakfast in Miss Braithwaite's pretty morning room, her hostess arose.

"It will soon be eleven, Cicely dear. You are quite fit to go to Father Morley? I need not ask him to come here?" she said.

"I could go there, but why does he want me?" asked Cicely.

"I never ask why Father Morley wants me; I'm too grateful to be allowed to see him," said Miss Braithwaite smiling. "He is the most saintly person I have ever known, and his father, a convert, once an Episcopalian clergyman, was a confessor of the Faith, who suffered for it. This saintly son was his reward, one of his rewards! I'll write three tiny notes, Cicely, then we'll go in my coupé to ask Father Morley himself, what he wants of brave Cis!"

At half past ten Miss Braithwaite and Cis set forth, "not to risk keeping Father Morley waiting," Miss Braithwaite said.

"I'll leave you here, and return for you," she told Cis, stopping her car before the Jesuit house and school. "I have two people whom I ought to see this morning, if it is at all possible. I'll be back here not later than noon, I hope. But wait for me; I won't fail you. One never is able to make a positive engagement to the minute, when a car is involved in its keeping."

CHAPTER XV

DECISION

THE lay-brother who responded to Cicely's summons on the bell was old, slow moving, kindly, but remote from daily affairs. He was probably inured to the coming of harassed people in hot haste to see one of the priests, and had learned to feel that haste was unnecessary, trouble but fleeting.

"Father Morley is expecting someone; he told me to say that he could not see anyone but her till after dinner. Would you be her? Cicely Adair was the name," the old brother said.

"Yes. Father Morley told me to come at eleven," replied Cicely.

"It's prompt you are," commented the brother, raising his hand for Cis to listen to the slow striking of a clock. "Go into that parlor yonder, the third one down; the first two are occupied."

Cis obeyed, and found herself in a narrow room, longer than was in good proportion to its width, furnished in a strictly utilitarian manner. A table stood in the centre, its top inset with green leather, a drawer running its length. Three cane-seated straight chairs, and one cane-seated armchair constituted the furniture of the room; on one side of the wall was a copy of a Murillo Madonna with a

pretty, blank face and too little chin; opposite to it an engraving of the then-reigning Pope.

Father Morley did not keep Cis waiting five minutes; he had been awaiting her. He entered with a smile, gave her one sharp look, and held out his hand.

"Good morning, my dear. You look better; I hope you are somewhat rested?" he said.

"Yes, Father. I slept hard. Miss Braithwaite was very kind," Cis said.

"When was Miriam Braithwaite otherwise, I wonder!" Father Morley said. "Tell me exactly what you think of her house and of her."

"Oh, the house!" Cis regained something of her animation as she repeated the words. "It is the most beautiful, and at the same time the dearest house in the world! That library! Full of books!"

"It surely is. Have you found out that 'the library' in many houses has no books in it?" Father Morley smiled at Cis as if he were sharing a pleasant bit of humor with her. "The Braithwaites have been book-lovers for generations. Well, and your hostess?"

"She is wonderful," cried Cis heartily. "She is the finest lady I ever saw, but she doesn't bother about it one bit. She makes you feel as though she'd do anything, and not be afraid; she's daring, as if she was riding a spirited horse, yet she is pious —well, I don't know exactly how she is pious! As if she rode that horse of hers right up to heaven and nothing could stop her!"

Father Morley flashed upon Cis a look which she

could not understand; it was surprised and delighted.

"My dear child, that is an inspired characterization!" he cried. "You have precisely hit off Miriam Braithwaite. If you can see that, we shall have you riding after her, her squire, upon her knightly errantry to eternity. Admirable, my child! I think you, too, are one who would greatly dare. You are to be a force for God in a world that needs that. And now, are you ready to tell me all about it, and let me give you a hand into the saddle for your own brave riding heavenward?"

"Yes, Father. I'd rather not tell you, but if I hadn't made up my mind to it I wouldn't have come to see you," said Cis. "Do you remember that I met you one Sunday coming away from the fire in those tenements in Harvest Street? And that I was with a young man?"

"Who was good looking and ready-tongued, whose name was Moore, but who told me that he had left the Church? Naturally I remember finding one of my girls under those influences," the Jesuit said.

"I am engaged to him," said Cis. "We were to be married on Christmas eve; my birthday is Christmas, and we have a lovely little apartment partly furnished. But—" Cis stopped.

"Yes? But, my child? You *were* to have been married? Past tense? You have learned that you cannot marry?" suggested Father Morley.

"Rodney has been true and honorable; he could not bring himself to marry me without telling me,"

Cis cried with a piteous look of appeal to the priest to acknowledge this fineness. "He had been married before; he is divorced. But his wife is dreadful; he couldn't stay married to her. He has an absolute divorce; he can marry again."

"Of course you know that he cannot," the Jesuit quietly corrected her. "He has the legal right to marry, I've no doubt, and we all have the tragic power to cast off our allegiance to God, but he cannot marry as you and I understand marriage. The Church does not demand the continuance of married life when it is outrageously degraded by one of the spouses, but you know that it is not within her power to annul the relation which lasts till death. Rodney Moore must endure his lot under the law which no pope nor council promulgated; God Incarnate declared it solemnly. Laws are for the general good, my child; they often bear hard on the individual, but that does not abrogate them. Moore was married to a nominal Catholic? Both baptized? Married by a priest?"

Then, as Cis bowed her head to each interrogation, Father Morley shook his head. "I am profoundly sorry for you, my daughter, but let us rejoice that the young man had left alive in him the decency not to deceive you. You are saved from a position which you would have assumed innocently, not knowing that the man was married, yet which would have been unfathomable wretchedness when you discovered the truth, that you were unmarried; only sheltered by the feeble arm of the state, which has no jurisdiction over the sacra-

ments. My child, I hardly know whether to be more sorry for your present suffering, or more glad that you are saved from far, immeasurably far, worse torture."

"Father Morley, you don't understand," Cis protested. "You talk as if it were all off; it isn't! I left Rodney after he told me, and I promised him to think it out, and tell him what I decided. I was shocked, horrified; I don't mind owning that, but he is perfectly splendid. I love him, oh, I love him! He says we build up all these ideas; that it is ridiculous to torment ourselves with these laws of the Church. He says God is not so unjust; he says that we should be truly—and, oh, how happily!—married. He wants me to come out bravely and marry him in the mayor's office, or somewhere, and be with him forever."

"You mean for years, when you say forever," Father Morley reminded her, allowing no note of disturbance to creep into his voice. "'Forever' is precisely the wrong word there. In point of fact it would be strictly a temporal union; I doubt its outlasting to old age, but it would most certainly not be forever, eternal! You know, Miss Adair, that people easily drift into the habit of divorce. This man would not be bound to you by stronger bonds than his inclination. The marriage made in the mayor's office can easily be set aside in one of the lower courts. The Church, you see, alone safeguards the woman. Wicked though this young man's wife may be, probably is, still her marriage is safeguarded for her to repent within its

walls. Her husband can repudiate her degradation, but he cannot replace her. You, if you went to live with him, pronounced his wife by a city official, would not be safeguarded at all, although you might not be the scorned woman that his wife is. Look you, Cicely Adair, you would not be better than she! With full knowledge you would reject your God and profane your own soul by the breaking of His law."

"Father Morley, do you mean that I—that I would be—would be—like her?" gasped Cis.

"Perhaps far worse," said the priest. "You do not know her temptations, her enlightenment, her instruction; she may have been weak and wretched, rather than deliberately wicked; you don't know. But you, clear-eyed, instructed, independent, able to look after yourself, you are dallying deliberately with good and evil, weighing both. If you denied your God what excuse would you give Him when you saw Him at last? That man tells you to come out from the Church *bravely!* Bravely! Faugh! That is not courage; it is cowardice, the coward who will not face pain for the sake of the Lord Who bore so much for her! A coward, I tell you! And do you realize that this country of ours is honeycombed with the divorce evil? That homes are wrecked, children made destitute, men and women sunk into vileness because they will not be denied their successive fancies, and that they profane marriage because they will not bear the brand of their true label? Will you tolerate the idea of joining their ranks, of helping to spread the poison which

eats away the very foundation of civilization? And then call that *brave?* Benedict Arnold tried to betray Washington and the gate to the north. What would your treason betray? You are disloyal, even to your land, when you do not set your face against that which is undermining her. Don't let yourself call your temptation by pretty names. It is not courage, but cowardice. It is not being married by a magistrate, for they cannot marry; it is being licensed to be called Mrs. Rodney Moore, but remaining the shamed Cicely Adair."

"Father Morley," poor Cicely's voice shook with dry sobs, "don't you see? Rod is great; he is not bad. Didn't God Himself give him to me to love?"

"Possibly; I don't say no," said the priest gently. "There are many strange ways by which souls are led home. But decidedly God did not give Rodney to you to marry, for he is not free to marry, and God does not want you to help Rodney to go lower. Perhaps he is given you to love and to save by sacrificing for him your happiness; it looks to me probable. Evidently Rodney has good in him, or he would not have told you that he was married, until he had you in his power. I can see how you love him when you can entertain an idea so repugnant to you as denying your Faith for him. This is your way of salvation, and in taking the right turn you can offer to God your pain; it will plead for grace for Rodney, cut off from it by his own act."

"I thought of that, Father," whispered Cis. "But, oh—never to see him? Never, never? This is my

engagement ring; Rodney made the design; I am a Christmas child."

The priest bent forward better to see it; his vision was short.

"A beautiful ring, my child; a beautiful design, beautifully wrought, but I see in it far more than the Christmas thought of your nativity which Rodney Moore meant to embody. It is the ring of prophecy. Red, the color of the martyrs; the heart's blood upheld by thorns, but therein glowing and burning celestially. Yes, my child, it is indeed your betrothal ring!"

Cis lifted her hand closer to her own eyes, dimmed with tears, and studied the ring as if it were new to her. Her hand shook so that the beautiful ruby emitted gleams of light, emphasizing the priest's interpretation of it. It's wearer's grief made it more beautiful.

For some time there was silence in the bare little parlor. Father Morley spoke no word; he left Cicely to absorb the words which he had spoken to her, spoken in his low, thrilling voice, straight to her soul. He ran through his fingers the beads of the rosary which hung from the black braid girdle that strapped his cassock, not speaking, praying for the soul before him fighting, tossing on black waters into which he could not enter. As each soul must struggle alone in mortal danger, seizing or rejecting aid, so this priest could only stand on the shore ready with powerful help, but he could not force the issue.

At last Father Morley arose and crossed the narrow room. He took from the wall a crucifix which Cicely had not noticed in taking account of its furnishings; it hung back of where she was sitting. It was a rare, a wonderful crucifix; the livid Figure upon it was marvellously carved with an expression of utter agony, dominated by a supreme love. This crucifix the Jesuit took from its nail, and, coming back, he bent over Cicely, holding out to her the cross.

She dropped her shaking hands into her lap, and lifted her eyes, first to the crucifix, then, piteously, to the kind, insistent face above it which looked down on her with pity yet with the assurance of awaiting good in the deep-set eyes.

"See, Cicely Adair, what was done for you. Can you count what you bear for Him? Can you refuse Him, especially that He promises surely that He will fill your soul with such joy as you have never known, if you hold to Him? Look, child, at the wounds; are you going to clinch your hands, like a niggard of the gift He asks? See the Side, riven that you may know what His Heart is! Will you go out from Him into shame, be an outcast from His altar, excommunicated? Cicely Adair, these lips are still athirst for the draft you hesitate to give them. Are you going to hold up to them vinegar and gall—again? You must give up Rodney; you must not betray your Lord; you must put that blood-red ruby at the foot of the cross. You must not delay. What is your answer, my child?"

Cicely remained silent, trembling so that her

whole body shook, but tearless, and all the time Father Morley waited, holding before her eyes the eloquent crucifix to plead with her.

Suddenly Cicely cried out with a long, low, heart-wrung cry, and sprang up, falling on her knees, her face bowed in her hands.

"I can't—I can't—leave Him!" she said.

Father Morley misunderstood.

"Child, you must!" he said. "You must leave him."

Cicely looked up, and a queer, dazed smile passed over her miserable face. "Oh, you don't mean that! You mean Rodney! I mean God. I can't, I can't leave God," she cried, and caught her breath in a strange little laugh, wholly like the Cis who could not help recognizing humor, however unmerry her tragic mood.

Father Morley smiled. His relief was unspeakable; he had won. He knew that if this girl chose she would abide by her choice; he knew that Cicely Adair was safe. And he felt a new, moving pity for her that she could smile at his urging her to forsake God, misunderstanding her pronoun, though the lips which twisted into the attempt to smile had just spoken the doom of her longing love for her lover.

"God bless you, my daughter, my brave, true girl!" the priest said. "Come, rise up. How really you have arisen! Shall we go into the church? I think we both should thank God, thank the Holy Spirit that has guarded you and inspired you. Will you not go to confession, Cicely? To-morrow morning you must receive the Lord to Whom you

have remained faithful. And then come to Him as nearly every day as you can, for He will carry you over the dark patch of roadway before you, into that bright light just beyond. Come, my dear, into the church. Shall I ask one of our Fathers to hear your confession? There are two or three in the house, I'm sure."

Cis let Father Morley help her to her feet, as she said:

"Don't you hear confessions, Father? I don't have to go twice, do I?"

"No, my dear; only once to-day!" Father Morley smiled at Cis, who, this time, did not know why he looked amused. "I thought you might prefer someone else to me. Come, then."

"Miss Braithwaite said she would come after me here," said Cis. "Perhaps I ought to wait for her."

"To be sure; she would come after you!" Father Morley cried admiringly. "She never half does anything! I'll tell the brother where you are; she'll look for you in the church, though I'm quite sure she would look for you there anyway, even though no word were left for her."

Three quarters of an hour later Miss Braithwaite turned her car around before the church. Cicely sat in the corner, her elbow on the top of the upholstered box which was behind the driver's seat, her head supported by her hand. She was quiet, but Miss Braithwaite hardly needed the reassuring smile which Father Morley gave her from the church step where he was seeing them off to tell her that Cicely was at peace. Her face was worn

and profoundly sad, but there was a new quality in its sadness, the serenity of a right decision.

On the way to her house Miss Braithwaite hardly spoke. Cis had feebly protested against returning there, but Miss Braithwaite had decisively told her that there was no question of her going elsewhere, at least till after New Year's. For one thing, her maid would be away for the rest of that week and Miss Braithwaite wanted someone to talk to; after that she expected to have grown so accustomed to talking to Cicely that she must keep her on.

Cis smiled, seeing the kindness that wanted to avoid thanks; too weary to discuss it; at heart relieved that she might stay in this peaceful and noble house, under the spell of its noble, though somewhat eccentric mistress.

At lunch Miss Braithwaite told Cis about the two cases which had occupied her that morning, and she succeeded in interesting the girl in spite of her preoccupation with her own thoughts. Miss Braithwaite's incisive English, clear-cut, finished, like a collection of cameos and intaglios in words, fascinated Cicely's ear, drawing her mind on to interest in the matter behind the speech.

"Would you rather go to your room, or will you keep me company before the fire in the library, Cicely?" asked Miss Braithwaite as they arose from the table.

"May I talk to you awhile?" asked Cis.

"All the afternoon; I've nothing on, and hoped you'd linger with me," replied Miss Braithwaite, putting her arm around the girl.

Thus she led her into that dusky, glowing room which had so charmed Cis on the preceding evening, and again put her into the deep chair of that first acquaintance.

"Miss Braithwaite, I've been to confession," Cis said abruptly.

"That accounts for the new quiet, an atmosphere of peace about you, Cicely dear," said Miss Braithwaite, leaning over and putting her hand on the girl's bright hair. "You have enlisted! Thank God for that. Don't imagine the victory is won, but your side can't lose, you know; it's only a matter of days and weeks! Then your banner on the tower!"

"Yes, Miss Braithwaite," said poor Cis somewhat forlornly. "I am thankful, you know. Only—What must be done I'd better do as quickly, as fast as I can. I promised to let him—let Rod hear from me. He has no idea where I am. He will have looked for me everywhere that I might have been, but he'll never guess I'm here. He is half mad by now. I must write him and send him this ring. I must tell him it is good-bye. Miss Braithwaite, I can't see him! I couldn't bear what he would say to me. I'm afraid to see him, that's the truth, but it would kill me to say good-bye, see him go away—I can't stand it!" Cis's voice rose on a hard, sharp note, and Miss Braithwaite laid her own hand over Cicely's.

"I know, I understand. I'll keep him off you. Write him here, now, dear Cis, and inclose the ring. Don't harass yourself by writing a long letter; the whole matter can be condensed into a few words.

You have chosen God; you are true to your first promises; that is all. But be sure to tell him how fully you appreciate his truth in dealing with you, albeit he spoke tardily, for we do not forget that we want to bring Rodney right, and it will infuriate him if he thinks that you do not attribute to him the good that was in him when he gave you the chance you are taking to free yourself from a wrong position," said this good woman, patting Cicely's hand as mothers pat their babies to sleep.

"Yes, Miss Braithwaite; I'd thought that would be what I must do," said Cis. "I have nothing with me, you know. Have you a pen that won't be spoiled by another person's using it? It ruins pens to lend them; I know that."

"Plenty of pens, besides the one that I guard like a seven-headed monster!" declared Miss Braithwaite rising with an alacrity that forbade Cis's considering the coming note in its proper light. "Come to my desk over here, and take any pen you like, save that one."

Cis followed her, and took the straight chair which stood before the desk.

She wrote slowly, pausing often, passing her hand over her eyes frequently, as if she could not see, but there was no moisture on the fingers afterward.

She laid before Miss Braithwaite the completed note, saying only:

"Please tell me if it is wrong in any way. I hope he'll know that it is hard to write him this. December 1st, isn't it? Christmas eve is very near."

Miss Braithwaite read; she had never seen

Cicely's writing before, but she knew that this irregular, wavering hand could not be the usual writing of this extremely definite girl with the strong, vivid face, the bright, radiant red hair.

"Dear Rodney:" the note ran. "I cannot marry you because you cannot marry me. It cannot be a marriage so I must go away, never come to the dear apartment again. I will not disobey God. If He helps me, I will die first, and, Rod, oh, Rod, this is like dying! You will be angry, and say that I do not love you, but if you try to remember me as I was, you will know that I love you. Perhaps if I loved you less I might not care so much to do right. I am sending you the ring. It was not a holly berry, but the heart's blood of your Christmas Cis that the ruby meant. Dear Rod, I bless you for your truthful dealing with me, that you would not trick me into the marriage which would never be a true one in the eyes of either of us, for we were both Catholics. I will try to be a better one so that God will hear me beg Him to bless you and bring you back. Will you please not try to see me, dear? Nothing that you could say would make me believe that it was right to marry you when you have a living wife, but the struggle to keep right is too hard on me, and I could not see you go away forever and live through it. I've borne all I can. So don't see me, my dearest, but don't forget me. Good-bye—it means God be with you, you know. Cis."

"It is quite right, dear girl," said Miss Braithwaite gently, touching the piteous little letter softly, as if it were a dead child.

Cis drew off her ring and kissed it many times. Then she dropped it into Miss Braithwaite's lap.

"Will you wrap it up in the letter and send it for me?" Cis said. "You are good to me, Miss Braithwaite. Will you teach me how to be this new Cis? The world used to be full of sounds; it seems to be quite still and empty. I suppose when you're dead it's like that. I don't know which way to walk."

CHAPTER XVI

WITNESSING

MISS BRAITHWAITE had to waken Cis in the morning to get her up in time to drive with her to St. Francis Xavier's for Mass.

It was a Mass of renunciation and espousal, a communion that pledged Cicely to turn from her forbidden love for Rodney to allegiance to God, yet she felt this but dimly. She went through the Mass dutifully, but humbly; she realized that she was vowing herself and that her vow was then accepted. Her will acquiesced, but at least one of the other powers of her soul was atrophied. Below her surfaces pain waited her awakening; she willed her martyrdom unfalteringly, but there was for her none of the martyrs' triumphant joy. Yet she received the Lord Who had once raised a maiden from the dead, and, groping for Him, found Him, how truly she did not then know.

"I must go to the office," Cis said suddenly to Miss Braithwaite at breakfast. "I wonder why I've only just thought of it? How could I forget! It is half past nine already. Miss Braithwaite, what shall I do? Ought I telephone Mr. Lucas first, ask him if he still wants me to come? You had me excused for only one day."

"No, my dear, I didn't," said Miss Braithwaite

promptly. "I didn't specify the length of your absence. I told Mr. Lucas that Cicely Adair was not at all well, could not possibly take up her duties, but that if she weren't able to resume them in less than a week he should hear from me again. He was entirely amiable, bade me let him know, also, if you needed anything that he could procure for you. So you are perfectly all right to be absent again to-day. If you feel like going down to-morrow I'll drive you down myself; we shall see!"

"How good you are to me, Miss Braithwaite!" cried Cis. "And I never shall be able to do the least thing for you!"

"Don't be too sure of it!" cried Miss Braithwaite. "I have designs on you! A girl of your sort can do no end of things for me, a proxy me, who is far more important than the me direct. There are several things near and dear to my heart which are more interesting and important than a fusty, aging maiden lady, Cicely Adair. For instance, I can imagine you giving my ragged hoodlum lads a royal good time when you're ready for it; my little scalawag boys whose qualities are a plaid; black and white, good and bad, fairly evenly mixed, though I do believe that the black has white hair lines in its blocks!"

"Orphan asylum?" asked Cis listlessly, yet her eyes had brightened slightly.

"Industrial school, orphans or half-orphans, little boys whom we Catholics must hold tight; if we relax in the least the devil will slip a claw in underneath our loosened fingers!" replied Miss

Braithwaite turning toward her maid, then bringing in the mail of the first delivery of that day.

"I was great pals with a funny bunch of newsies at home," said Cis, biting her lip and glancing anxiously at the small clock behind her as the sight of the letters reminded her of the note which Rodney might then be reading. Or had not Miss Braithwaite sent it out the previous night? She had not asked, she did not ask now, but the letters which Miss Braithwaite was assorting gave her the sickened feeling with which one hears the first clods fall upon a casket which the guy ropes have just let down forever.

"I knew you'd be great pals with that sort of youngster, Cicely," returned Miss Braithwaite, cheerfully adopting Cis's terms. "Letter for you, my dear; I had your mail sent here, from Miss Wallace's."

"Oh, it's Nan!" cried Cis. "Thank you, Miss Braithwaite."

She read her letter with a moved face and laid it down softly, stroking the pages.

"She'll be married on Christmas; she has hurried her arrangements because she wants us married together. Dear little Nannie! Good little Nan! She is happy, but she deserves to be. I hope she will be, always," Cis murmured, her face wistful, sad, but a gentle smile in her eyes.

"Well, dear, happiness is a term of comparison, but it usually takes years to teach us this," said Miss Braithwaite. "If your little bride-friend is good, with the sort of goodness you convey an im-

pression of, she is likely to be happy. Enkindled people rise to rapture, but they sink into wretchedness; it's safer to shine by refraction than to be enkindled, my dear."

"How do you know the things you understand, Miss Braithwaite?" cried Cis. "I have hardly talked of Nan to you, yet you have her measure! I must write her, tell her. It will make her most unhappy! I don't know how I can tell her I'm not to be married, after all. Nan will feel like a thief to be happy when I'm not. And she has taken the same day, so that we could be happy together, though apart. I won't tell her anything except that my plan is all off, done with forever. I bought some lovely, perfectly beautiful damask, Miss Braithwaite; three table-cloths, napkins for each, and I've been doing hemstitched hems. They were for me, you know, for—Luckily they're not marked yet. I'm not much good at embroidery, though I drew the threads and hemstitched quite decently. I was going to have them marked, embroidered letters, you know—'*C. A.*' I'd better have them marked A. M. D.—Anne Margaret Dowling—and send them to Nan, hadn't I? Would that be nice? I almost feel as though anything of mine might bring her bad luck!"

"There's no such thing as bad luck, Cis child!" cried Miss Braithwaite, trying not to let Cis see how much her quiet renunciation of her sweet hopes, stitched into her linen, moved her. "I am sure that your damask would bring Nan blessing; it is a cloth from an altar of sacrifice! It would be a beautiful

gift, child, and Nan need not know, not now, at least, that it was at first intended for another home."

"I'll go around to Miss Wallace's to-day and get it then," said Cis with a grateful look for her hostess. "And, Miss Braithwaite, I've got to plan. I've a good position here, I like Beaconhite, and I've got to live somewhere, but—I'll always be afraid to walk out; I can't meet Rod. Don't you think, perhaps, I'd better go away? Not home; somewhere? And, oh, do you think Rod will try to see me? Miss Braithwaite, I can't see him! What shall I do?"

"I've been considering these points, Cis, my dear," said Miss Braithwaite, evidently equipped with a decision upon them. "I am sure that Rodney Moore will try to see you once. I think that he will come here; he will hardly attempt to say to you what he will want to say in the street, meeting you on your way to and from the Lucas and Henderson offices. You need not see him here; I will see him for you. After that, I am hopeful that he will let you alone. I do not know him, but I know human nature, and I believe that after I have seen him for you, he will let you alone. As to keeping on with the office, that is as you please. But, Cicely, I have a proposition which I want you to consider; to be truthful, I do not want you to consider it, but to take it up at once. I am a solitary woman in this great house, with no one but servants around me. I want you to spend the winter here, with me. I hope for your help in my schemes; Father Morley's

girls' club, my tatterdemalions, other things. You are young, attractive, bright; you can do all sorts of work for these objects. Then, for me, you can do more! Be a little fond of me, talk to me, companion me. And, last not least, for yourself; read my books—perhaps not every one on those shelves, but many of them; play a little, study a little, think a great deal; you went through school, now give yourself a little riper, deeper, higher education! And, Cis, dear, learn your faith! It seems a pity to miss its beauty, the joy it has for you, when you've bravely embraced unhappiness for it! As if you had risked your life for one almost a stranger, as you thought, and suddenly discovered it was your dearest, beloved friend! You'll be delighted with the Church, my dear, when you get acquainted with her beauty! Dear, you've missed happiness and it's hard, but happiness more profound and lasting is within your reach; I promise it to you! Now, Cis, will you stay with me?"

"Oh, Miss Braithwaite, I'd just dearly love to!" cried Cicely, springing up to throw herself on her knees beside Miss Braithwaite, her radiant head on her shoulder, sobbing a little, yet with the first ray of comforting hope penetrating her despair.

Cicely arose the next morning to resume life on its new basis, yet under its old routine. This is, perhaps, the hardest strain imposed upon anyone who is newly bereft, by death or by the crueller deprivations of life. To go once more amid the familiar surroundings, greet the accustomed faces with a surface smile, seeing with bewildered amaze-

ment that the eyes smiling back recognize one for the same person that they have always seen though one feels like a shade walking the earth in the semblance of life, this is to deepen that painful sense of remoteness from common experience, which is the lasting hallmark of profound suffering.

It was decided that Cis was to spend the winter with Miss Braithwaite. She was glad to accept the shelter of this house, yet more glad of the home open to her in the affections of this clever and spiritual gentlewoman than of the actual shelter of her dignified roof. For Cis, to her own bewilderment, found herself with little of her natural self-reliance. Beaten down by her recent struggle, though she had emerged victorious, she was scarred and torn by wounds still bleeding; she had accurately described herself to Miss Braithwaite as not knowing "how to walk."

Miss Braithwaite's hand guiding her was strong and warm; she sustained her stumbling feet, poured the wine of her wholesome, humorous point of view into her wounds, and, at the same time, taught her to see the Perfect Beauty which by its perfection made all else worthless.

Beyond her winter with Miss Braithwaite, Cis laid no plans; she was not sure whether or not she should continue in Mr. Lucas' office; for that matter, she was not sure that she might do so. She had determined to confess to Mr. Lucas her fault in giving to Rodney Moore the hint he had asked for as to the final outcome of the franchise which was agitating the public mind. She would not stay on

with him unless Mr. Lucas knew the worst of her; after he knew it the decision about her staying was in his hands. She had notified Mr. Lucas that she would leave him before Christmas to be married; he probably had supplied her place from that time on. Well, all this was as it might be. Dressing slowly, with long intervals of absent-minded gazing out of the window, Cis was sure only that she was going to the office, confess to Mr. Lucas, do the one thing left her honorably to do; after that—nothing mattered greatly, anyway. She did not know, nor much care what came after that.

Cis would not acknowledge to herself that she feared, with positively curdling fear, meeting Rodney. She felt sure that he would try to waylay her when she resumed her daily trips to and from the office. It seemed to her that if she withstood him, his reproaches, but much more his appeals—and she was sure that she could withstand them—that afterward the feeble ray of courage within her would be extinguished; that she had borne to her capacity.

Therefore it was an unspeakable relief to find that Miss Braithwaite was taking her down that morning in her coupé and planning to bring her home at night.

"You're not quite at par, my dear, though you intend to take dictation in regard to soaring investments," she said. "I'm going in all sorts of directions this morning; the Lucas and Henderson offices one of them, so you're to be deposited at their door with no exertion on your part."

"Oh, Miss Braithwaite, I'll never be able to thank you!" cried Cis. "How you do see through people! But I don't mind your knowing I'm a coward."

"A certain sort of cowardice is the highest courage, child; the courage to acknowledge danger and flee from it. Come along, Cicely Adair! Did you ever see that ridiculous Dollinger ballad? All about the dangerous voyage of a canal boat of which one Dollinger was captain? The refrain of each stanza is: 'Fear not, but trust in Dollinger and he will fetch you through.' It doesn't matter; only old fogies know it, I suppose. Regard me as Dollinger, for I mean to fetch you through! Come, then!"

Miss Braithwaite slipped her hand into Cis's arm and took her out to the waiting car. Then she started off and drove Cicely to her destination, where she left her with a heartening pat on her shoulder and the promise to return for her at five.

Mr. Lucas looked up with a smile of greeting when he heard Cis's light touch on the handle of the office door, but the smile died on his lips, replaced by a look of concern, as he started to his feet at the sight of her.

"Why, Miss Adair, I had no idea that you had been seriously ill; I did not get that impression from Miriam Braithwaite. Pray take my chair till you are rested. I am profoundly sorry to see you so white and weakened," he cried, kindly coming forward to take Cicely's hand and gently force her into his own armchair.

"No, Mr. Lucas, thank you," said Cis, resisting

his kindness. "I have not been ill. Something happened—I had a shock—I'll be all right soon. Mr. Lucas, before I begin to work, before you say another word to me, there is something that I must tell you."

"Ah!" murmured Mr. Lucas, experienced in human nature, and instantly guessing something of what he was to be told. "I am ready to listen, Miss Adair."

"I was engaged to be married; I told you that I was to have been married at Christmas; I resigned for that date for that reason," said Cis, plunging, without letting herself delay her confession. "Rod —Mr. Moore, the one I was to marry—begged me to give him a hint about the franchise. He had some money; he wanted to buy that stock if the franchise was going through. He swore he would not let a hint of it get beyond him; I'm sure he wouldn't—"

"Why is everyone sure that everyone else will be more honorable in keeping a secret than he—or she—is?" asked Mr. Lucas dryly. "I see that you parted with mine."

"Yes, Mr. Lucas, but indeed, indeed I held out long against it; I didn't want to do it; I've always been quite straight," cried Cis. "But Rod begged so hard; he told me that I was standing between him and success. I didn't mind scolding, but when he was hurt—Well, at last I gave the hint he begged for, and I've been eating my heart out ever since. Now that you know, I'll feel better, and of course I'll go right away now; not wait till Christmas."

"Just a moment, Miss Adair. I do not think we should be weak, any of us; it is the ideal to be granite shafts of principle, but the sweeter and truer the woman, the harder for her to resist the sort of plea made you. I can see that it was hard; if it had not cost you pain to yield you would not be confessing your misstep to me now. I must forgive it, Miss Adair; it was a hard pull, and I'll credit you with resistance. It has not harmed me, you'll be glad to know. I wondered, rather, why there were noticeable sales of that stock on a recent date; your lover must have had considerable to invest in it. That chapter is closed; put it out of your mind. Now, my child, you were sent me by my brother, as a friend, in a sense, of my niece Jeanette's, and I have a greater interest in you than that of a mere employer. Will you let me express it in a question? You have spoken of your engagement, your marriage, in the past tense. Are you not still engaged, still to be married at Christmas?" Mr. Lucas asked his question gently, pity in his eyes.

"No, sir; it's all over," said Cis.

"Not because of this franchise matter? You're not a morbid girl to do penance, and punish a man for a thing of that sort?" cried Mr. Lucas.

"No, Mr. Lucas," said Cis. "Rod was married; I could not marry him. He was splendid; he told me about it. He was not going to tell me, but I love everything straight so much that after all he told me. And then we could not be married, you see. It was splendid; Rod was good, but still I could not go on with it."

"Go on with it? Rod was splendid, you say? To tell you, to *tell* you he was married, after he had entrapped you into an engagement, into loving him as I see you loved him? Well, hardly splendid! He did stop short of crime, but to stop on the edge of bigamy, and to make a girl like you suffer! I'd hardly call that splendid!" cried Mr. Lucas fiercely.

"Bigamy?" repeated Cis. "Well, I don't believe they call it that, but of course it is, if you stop to think. I hadn't thought about it just that way. Rod was divorced; his wife was worse than dead, but she wasn't dead. I suppose it is bigamy."

The word seemed to hold a horrid fascination for Cis.

Mr. Lucas fell back in his chair and stared at Cis, trying to get his bearings.

"Divorced?" he echoed. "Oh, but, my girl, that's another matter! Of course remarriage is not bigamy when the state has freed a man. Then he has no wife, so his marriage to a second one is not bigamy; it is as if the first one were dead."

Cis shook her head. "No, Mr. Lucas," she said, "it really isn't; how could it be? Suppose I were walking with Rod, had married him, and we met his first wife. It wouldn't be the same as if she were dead, would it? There'd be two of us, both alive. How do you suppose I'd feel; how would any decent girl feel? Besides, Mr. Lucas, Rod was married by a priest, and no one can break those marriages. I'd have had to give up God to marry Rod. and how could I?"

Mr. Lucas frowned angrily.

"It's that abominable Roman tyranny again," he cried. "How in the name of all that's sane do those priests get hold of minds the way they do? You poor little victim of man-made laws, posing for Divine ones, have you wrecked your life and a man's life for this nonsense?"

"No, Mr. Lucas," said Cis with a weary little gasp for breath, but not in the least shaken. "You are ever so much wiser than I, but I know that is not true. Our Lord Himself said that a divorced person could not be married, and what can you do when He tells you anything? I think I can see why it has to be, because outside the Catholic Church people keep going in and out of marriages till you'd think they'd be dizzy. And then there are the children. No, Mr. Lucas, it's all right, even though it hurts. And, anyway, how could I turn my back on the Church? God's there."

"You told me once that you were—what's their term for it?—an indifferent Catholic. That you weren't devout like some friend of yours, or was it Jeanette Lucas? Yet you make the choice of your Church instead of your happiness! I see what it has cost you; your face betrays your suffering. You, who could not stand firm against your lover's pleading to you to put him in the way of making money, only of making money; who did violence to your hatred of not 'being square,' as you put it, you leave him, throw him over, infuriate him, wound his pride, as well as his love of you—for no man would do less than curse a woman for thus failing him after he had let her have the chance to choose—all

for an idea; for allegiance to a system; to keep within a Church which was not especially dear to you! And this when the laws of your country would justify your choosing the man, would place their seal upon your position in society as his wife! My heavens, Cicely Adair, what is it, what can it be that can so mold you into a Christian martyr, singing as the wild beasts rend her?"

Mr. Lucas sat erect, frowning heavily, his eyes flashing, for the problem before him stirred him to his depths. He had already encountered it in his brother's conduct; he resisted the one explanation of it which his reason presented to him.

Cis smiled her pitiful, funny little shadow of her normal bright, amused smile, and looked up at Mr. Lucas, saying:

"I'm not singing, Mr. Lucas, not so you'd notice it! But I wouldn't want the wild beasts to go off and lie down, not if it would turn me back. You see, it's quite easy. I mean to understand. I've got to stand by, if I want God to stand by me, and what should I do if He didn't? And that's not all of it. I love Rod, but God is different; you can't get on without Him. I think He'll teach me to get on without Rod, somehow. I suppose I had more faith than I knew I had. It's all faith, isn't it, Mr. Lucas?"

"Yes! It is all faith, Cicely Adair!" cried Mr. Lucas, springing to his feet. "You've testified to yours! I don't mind telling you that I think it is a great thing that you have done. I suppose I'm intelligent enough to recognize what the loose mar-

riage laws are doing in this country. As a lawyer I know their effect on morals, the stability of home, the legitimacy of children. But that a slip of a girl should willingly throw over her strong love, her dearest hopes; a poor, pitiful little bead of clay set herself against the mighty torrent of evil, all because a Church tells her to, promises her heaven if she does—good Lord! We Episcopalians discountenance divorce, but our ministers may or may not marry divorced people, according as they are minded. The opposition of bishops and clergy to their doing so is straw, because there is nothing to enforce it, but you, who were not devout, you embrace your hard lot at the bidding of your priests! As there is a God above us, Cicely Adair, what is the power of Rome that still can make confessors and martyrs of soft virgins?"

"The God above us, isn't it, Mr. Lucas?" said Cicely.

Mr. Lucas stared at her a moment, then he said:

"And now it turns you into an apologist! Your answer covers all sides of the question, admitting a premise! And the premise almost annihilates the necessity of admission! I will look into it—" He checked himself quickly, and said with a change of voice: "You will stay on in my employ, Miss Adair? You will not now leave me at Christmas? Do you feel fit to resume your desk to-day?"

"I came to work, Mr. Lucas, if you don't mind having me after I told the secret—"

"A closed book!" Mr. Lucas interrupted her, raising his hand prohibitively. "I'm not afraid of

the honor that would not let you rest till you had acknowledged your weakness. I hardly think that what I know of you would justify my doubting your fidelity."

"Thank you, Mr. Lucas. You are as good as you can be to me! I'll go to work then, now. May I have till New Year's to decide how long I'll be here?" asked Cis, going over to put her hat and coat away, and then dropping into her desk chair.

"New Year's will be time enough to decide," said Mr. Lucas, also resuming his desk chair. To himself he said, with an inward smile: "I wonder if that glowing hair was given her for a nimbus? There are easier martyrdoms than hers!"

CHAPTER XVII

GOOD-BYE

IT WAS pleasant to come out from the great office building at half past four to find waiting a motor coupé of the most correct and up-to-date type. It was still pleasanter to find the car door held open by a small hand in a grey glove that managed, in spite of its smallness and other occupation, to give a welcoming pat with two fingers on Cicely's shoulder as she entered the car; to meet a warm smile in a pair of appraising eyes, and hear a beautiful voice say heartily:

"Well, child, the morning and the evening were the first day! Was this first one hard, or was it rather agreeable to pick up the threads again?"

For the first time in her life Cis had a sense of belonging, and it warmed her with a thrill of actual pleasure, the perception that in spite of all and after all, it might be good to be alive.

What a beautiful thing this elderly gentlewoman was doing, Cis thought, thus to feed the hungry! There were many who limited that corporal work of mercy strictly to its proper bounds; few who fed the hungry of heart, mind, and soul in Miss Braithwaite's way, and yet it was more like feeding than it was like a ministration to the soul. To take Cis into her home, to warm her into renewed life, to

open up to her hitherto unknown resources for the maintenance of life's true values, this was Miss Braithwaite's divinely inspired dealing with Cis. The girl knew that Miss Braithwaite was an aristocrat to her finger tips, exclusive in her friendships, withdrawn by instinct; that she wisely and justly chose those whom she would admit into her home. How fine it was then to fly at once to the rescue of Cicely Adair at the summons of Father Morley, mothering her as he had asked her to! Plainly, Cicely Adair must repay this goodness by its success with her; she must be good and happy; put away grief; grow in the directions which Miss Braithwaite indicated. Now that, for all the rest of the winter, Cis was to be an inmate of this ideal home—well, after all and in spite of all, Cis ought not to find her share of the days hard to fulfill.

Miss Braithwaite would not let Cis tell her anything of the events of her day during dinner.

"Dinner should be eaten to the accompaniment of chat, but not of long, nor of too absorbing tales, my dear," she declared in her crisp little dogmatic way, half amused with herself, yet entirely in earnest as to her dictum. "You will not eat properly if you recount to me the history of Mr. Wilmer Lucas and his reception of his secretary's confession of crime! I know perfectly well that your wishbone will not be scraped clean if you are too absorbed in talk—it is chicken to-night! Beside the hearth, Cis; that's the place for a long narrative! The table for brief comments and flashes of wit. At the table I disapprove of discussions, mono-

logues, anything that too greatly distracts from the business in hand!"

Later, "beside the hearth," Miss Braithwaite handed Cis the tongs, and lay back in her deep chair with a breath of content. She looked like some sort of bird, tiny, alert, her quick, keen eyes flashing behind the eyeglasses resting on her thin arched nose; her hands making sudden small movements characteristic of them, not unlike the uplifting of a wing, its outspread and infolding.

"There are times that I doubt my own nobility of soul, Cicely Adair," she said, her mobile lips twisting with a tiny mocking smile. "But when I'm before the hearth fire, and hand someone else the tools to stir and mend it, then I know that I am fit to rank with the noblest Roman matron! Perhaps I mean Roman ladies living in the catacombs; I've no doubt that they were more self-sacrificing than the Mother of the Gracchi and the rest of 'em! Do lift that log end, Cis! It's wasting there, smoldering out; make it blaze."

Cis obediently lifted the charred end of a log into the heart of the fire, and then, at: "Now tell me!" from Miss Braithwaite, told her story of Mr. Lucas' reception of her confession to him, and his comments on her obedience to her conscience.

Miss Braithwaite sat erect as she listened, her face expressing her interest.

"My dear child, you never can tell!" she cried as Cis ended. "Robert Lucas became a Catholic about ten years after I did; he is fifteen years younger than I. Wilmer Lucas was no less dis-

gusted than he was angry. He said that Robert had made a fool of himself, that with his mind continually hovering over kisses upon the pope's toe he never could get anywhere, amount to anything! Wilmer always enjoyed vigorous symbolical language! In point of fact Robert Lucas has gone far, has amounted to a great deal. He is not involved in national politics, as our lawyer Wilmer is, but he is a successful man, and no one ever speaks of him without paying tribute in the highest terms to his lofty character. Wilmer Lucas is honorable and honored, but it is Robert, not he, whose goodness seems to impress people over and above his other qualities. Wilmer Lucas has been most intolerant of the Church all these years; he is protestant, not only against her directly, but against her intrusion into his family. He is exceedingly fond of Robert's daughter Jeanette, by the way. I have always seen that in the case of Father Morley, whom he avoids; my own case; his unwillingness to allow his brother ever to speak on the subject, Wilmer Lucas betrays his perception of the impregnable position of the Old Church, that he pays her tribute, though it is in a form not unlike the tribute to her Founder recorded in the Gospel. He is a man of logical mind, highly trained to sift evidence; he cannot fail to perceive the immense difference between her consistent logic and the shifting sands of mere opinion outside of her, nor can he account for her hold on men's souls down through the ages by natural means. Now, to-day, you have startled him by a new instance of the power of conscience.

I am glad that you look pale, Cis dear, that you show suffering! And how it must have impressed him that, though you could not withstand Rodney's pleading with you to do what you held wrong in a lesser matter, you have held your Faith against all pressure from without and within! Evidently Mr. Lucas is impressed, the more so that he had not thought you particularly devout. Perhaps it will set him thinking, farther and hard! As I set out by saying, you never can tell!"

"Oh, Miss Braithwaite, it isn't likely that Mr. Lucas would pay attention long to no-consequence me!" cried Cis.

"You—never—can—tell!" repeated Miss Braithwaite emphatically. "Usually a train of circumstances, some of them trivial and hardly noted, lead men to the Truth; it is like a sort of Divine hare-and-hounds; tiny scraps of paper flutter along the trail, unconsciously seen by the players, till at last! The goal and the game won!"

"That's great, Miss Braithwaite!" cried Cis with quick appreciation of the figure. "I wish I were that sort of a scrap of paper, but it's not likely."

"Never can tell!" Miss Braithwaite harped on her premise. "I've always noticed that when God breaks us, my dear, it's to use the pieces in new combinations, and for good. It is as if we were picture puzzles, with reverse sides. We're something quite pretty at first; then the pieces are tossed and displaced by a great experience, and, if we submit and wait, behold God's Hand puts us all together again, the reverse side up, and the picture is no

longer merely a pretty thing, but a beautiful, shining illumination, of which all who run may read its meaning which is at once a magnet and a map of the way."

"Miss Braithwaite, you tell me wonderful things!" cried Cis softly. "If I'm here all winter with you I ought to amount to something; I'll try to. It's strange that I don't hear—from Rodney. Do you suppose he isn't going to say one word to me? I was sure he'd try to see me. Do you think he's given right up like this?"

"From my experience of men I'd say decidedly not," said Miss Braithwaite. "However, it is strange that he makes no sign. Perhaps he's the exception; that his anger will prevent him from claiming to hear his verdict from your lips, but very few men would submit to banishment on the strength of a brief note from you."

"I will not see him; he can't hear the verdict from my lips!" cried Cis. "What would be the use? Only miserable pain; parting all over again. I'm so afraid of meeting him! You can't drive me everywhere I go. I truly think I ought to leave Beaconhite; I think perhaps I must."

"Well, well, we'll see! Not to-night, at least! To-morrow is also a day. I like those wise old sayings. I hope that you may stay on; you need Father Morley for a while. Yes, Ellen; someone to see me?" Miss Braithwaite turned toward her maid, entering with a card on a small salver.

"No, Miss Braithwaite, for Miss Adair. He—the caller—was determined to walk right in, but I

made him go into the reception room," said Ellen, who, like most good and faithful servants, was perfectly conversant with household affairs; took care that whatever happened under the roof should, in some way, transpire to her.

"Miss Braithwaite, see him! Hide me! I can't, I can't!" gasped Cis, snatching at the card, instantly dropping it and looking wildly around.

"G. Rodney Moore," Miss Braithwaite read. "Go out that door, Cis; I'll see him. Ellen, take Miss Adair through the little passage to the back stairs. Then go down and show Mr. Moore up here. Be quiet, Cicely; this is your last trial, my dear. Go up and say your beads and fear not, my child."

Cis escaped, hurrying away, yet everything in her called upon her to stay. An instant, and she could see Rodney; a word, and they would never part.

Rodney Moore came half stumbling into Miss Braithwaite's library. He found that little lady standing to receive him beside her hearth; the position of the chairs told him that she had not been long alone.

Although Miss Braithwaite had never seen Rodney Moore before, she recognized upon his face, in his disordered clothes, the marks of unhappy disturbance of mind. He stopped short seeing her, and said:

"I want Cicely Adair."

"I know you do," said Miss Braithwaite, and there was pity in her voice. "Sit down, Mr. Moore. Miss Adair has asked me to see you for her. She

will not be able to endure anything more than she has borne."

"The devil she won't!" burst out Rodney. "What about me? I don't count, eh? She can write me a cool note and expect that to satisfy the man who saw her last in the place he was fitting up for her to live in with him? Not much! I'd have been here before, but I didn't know where she was. She left me; walked off like an oyster, with no heart nor tongue in it, and, when I tried to connect with her, she was gone. They couldn't tell me anything about her at her boarding house. I found out that was the truth, too, and then I went off to see her old friend, Nan Dowling; I was sure she had run off to her, but no one had seen her there. I read all the papers—you know what I was afraid I'd see in one of 'em! I came back here, half crazy with fear, and I found that damned cool, calm note waiting for me, my ring in it! That Holly ring! So here I am. Bring Cis here. I've a right to see her. Don't you try to keep her off!"

"Miss Adair was in this room when your card was brought up, Mr. Moore. She ran away, praying me to keep you from her; she will not see you. It is she, not I, who decides," said Miss Braithwaite.

"You lie!" cried Rodney hoarsely. "Do you suppose I don't know Cis? Nothing cold-hearted about her! I'll go through this house till I find her, and when I find her—" He stopped, unable to go on; he had risen, and stood holding to the back of a chair, as if he might flay Miss Braithwaite with it.

"You will remain precisely where you are until you leave my house," said the tiny woman quietly. "You will not step your foot beyond the boundary to which I admit you. You do well to threaten me, and to threaten a suffering girl whom you love! Be seated, Mr. Moore, and listen to me. I am truly sorry for you; it is hard, harder for you than for Cicely, for she suffers for a righteous cause, and you suffer because you are a traitor to that cause."

"None of your sermons!" cried Rodney. "If I hated the Roman Catholic Church before, and was glad I was shunt of it, how do you suppose I like it now that it is stealing my wife? Cis is a girl; girls are easy fooled; they're all alike when it comes to priests and stuff. I could have held my tongue and married Cis; this is what I get for being straight with her. Is that fair?"

"You could not have married Cis; you might have succeeded in ruining her life. Be thankful that you had the grace to stop at the crime you contemplated toward her," Miss Braithwaite said. "But I truly believe, Mr. Moore, that this is not all that you get for being straight. I believe that good is coming to you, unforeseen good, because you conquered the temptation to trick her into a legal marriage that never in her eyes—nor at the last issue in yours, either—would have been a marriage. For so mighty is truth, so strong its hold upon us, that we can never free our souls from its blessed bondage. Our lips and our actions may deny it; what we have been taught persists in our souls, often saving us, at

last. Now do one last, fine, atoning act: go away and leave Cis to find her way back into peace. You say she wrote you calmly, coldly. I saw the note written, there, at that desk. She wrote it in agony. Surely you could read agony there if you were not blinded with your own pain! Pain, but also anger, Mr. Moore! Remember your pang is partly the wrath of defeat."

"See here, I'm not calling on you. You may be a duchess, which you act like, but I'm not your serf!" cried Rodney. "I won't take this from you. Cis has to refuse to see me. Send her here. How do I know you haven't got her locked up somewhere, you and a priest?"

"Because you are not a fool," said Miss Braithwaite contemptuously. "Take a sheet of paper from that desk, at which Cicely sat to write to you, and write upon it any message you please. My maid shall take it to her. After that, if she will not see you, you will leave my house and I trust be man enough to torment the girl no more."

"You're a high-handed little labor leader, if you are a fine lady, aren't you?" cried Rodney, almost admiringly, in spite of his rage.

He crossed the room, took up a piece of paper from the desk, shook down the ink in his own fountain pen, and wrote several lines. Then he took an envelope, laid his note inside and sealed it.

"Servants are curious," he said. "Are you going to call yours?"

Miss Braithwaite rang, and Ellen appeared.

"Please take Mr. Moore's note to Miss Adair, Ellen," said Miss Braithwaite. "Wait till she has read it, and bring back her reply, please."

"No! I'll go with you! Take me—I'll follow you, Ellen; go ahead," said Rodney, starting toward the door.

"Rodney Moore, you forget yourself! Stay where you are. Ellen, do as I have told you; this young man will wait here for your return."

Miss Braithwaite drew herself up to her full five feet of height, but there was in her eyes and voice that which no one ever lightly disobeyed. Muttering something, Rodney fell back, and stood beside the library table, fumbling the magazines upon it with shaking hands.

There was perfect silence in the room for a strained quarter of an hour of waiting. A log on the fire broke and fell apart; Rodney jumped, his nerves quivering from sleepless nights and days of baffled will, together with fear as to Cicely's fate. Then Ellen returned and handed back to Rodney the note which he had sent to Cis. Upon it she had written, almost illegibly, across the final page:

"Rod, dear, I can't see you, truly I can't. It would be harder for us both. I would give up anything on earth for you, but I will not give up God for you. Please, Rod, don't try to see me, never, oh, never! And please, please, Rod dear, not so much forgive me as say to yourself: Poor Cis—Holly was right. It is right to serve God first. And be a good boy yourself, Rod, my beloved, and come back, too, so that after a few little years we'll be together forever

and ever. But till then, please let this be good-bye. Cis."

Rodney crushed the poor little note in the palm of his hand, then he smoothed it out, laying it flat on his hand. Then he looked down on it, standing quite still. Then he bent down to it and kissed it. Miss Braithwaite knew that the long, silent waiting for it; the reaction from his harrowing fear, now that he knew Cis was safe; his proximity to her; his better self, perhaps the graces of his boyhood, had conquered. Rodney had struck his colors and accepted defeat.

"This settles it, Miss Braithwaite," he said. "There's nothing more to hang around for. You are right; Cis decides it herself. I beg your pardon for my impertinence, but—"

"I shall not remember it, Mr. Moore; you have been sorely tried. I do not wonder that your nerves snapped. Will you let me say to you that with all my heart I wish you well? Happy, too, though I know the word sounds mocking in your ears tonight?" Miss Braithwaite's voice was exceedingly kind; her heart went out to Rodney, whose state was immeasurably more to be pitied than Cicely's.

"Thanks," said Rod miserably. "It does sound what you might call far-fetched. You might tell Cicely, if you will, that I'm going away; I won't stay in Beaconhite. I haven't the heart to stay; I'd be always looking along the streets for her. Tell her I'll stick with the same concern, and, if she ever needed me for anything, to address me in care of Hammersley and Rhodes, Chicago. That's the head

office, and they'll forward anything. Good night, Miss Braithwaite. Is Cis staying with you long?"

"I hope all winter," said Miss Braithwaite. "It's only fair to her to tell you that she has gone through utter agony; her victory over herself has been hard won, so don't underrate it, and try to see the value of eternal things, if such a girl as our Cicely Adair can turn from joy and love for their sake. Cis could not go to you into the wrong; come to her into the right. And God bless you, poor lad."

"Thanks," said Rodney again. "I'm done with Church, but I'm much obliged; you mean it well. I hope Cis will stay on; you'll look after her. I don't understand how she came to be here; I suppose you're one of these befriending women. Good-bye. Tell Cis—No! What's the use? You can't send messages that do any good. I wish I could kiss her good-bye. She's—she's a wonder! Oh, good God, what's the use? Good-bye, Miss Braithwaite."

Rodney turned and dashed toward the door. He collided with the end of the bookcase nearest it, fell back, begged its pardon, and with a second dash was gone. Miss Braithwaite drew a long breath, and turned toward the fire, picking up the tongs to mend it, under the necessity of action; she was considerably disturbed.

"It's most wearing to have love affairs, even by proxy," she told herself. "He's not without attraction, and I can see that he's remarkably handsome when he has slept, and eaten, and shaved. Dear me, what a singular thing it is that with all the millions

of people there are in the world one can become so vitally necessary to another that the loss of him—or her—is cataclysmic in effect! I wonder how the saints endure all the human disturbances unloaded upon them for their help! I find it exhausting. But then I have not died, and thus gained the larger point of view! And, furthermore, it's barely possible that I'm not a saint! Now for my poor Cis! I can imagine her state with Rod downstairs and her polarized will holding her upstairs, forever separated, yet with but twenty-five feet between them!"

Miss Braithwaite went upstairs. She found Cis on her knees at the balustrade, her face pressed to the spindles, which her fingers tightly clasped.

It was a wet face that she raised to Miss Braithwaite, but she was glad to see it so; tears were healing.

"I heard his voice; I saw him go out, Miss Braithwaite! He will never come to me again! Oh, Miss Braithwaite, Miss Braithwaite!" Cis sobbed.

"Well, as to that," began Miss Braithwaite in a customary formula of hers, as she lifted Cis gently to her feet and led her into her chamber, "I'm not so sure. You see, even though we live only about seventy years, it's amazing the things that can happen in that time, things which we declared impossible! I have a notion that you may not be through with Rodney Moore, and his affairs, but I doubt that they will always mean to you as much as they do now. He behaved well, my dear—at the last! I'm bound to say that he seemed ready for personal

violence upon me at first. He accepted your decision completely, quietly, and nicely. He told me to say to you that he was leaving Beaconhite, but may be reached through the main office of his firm in Chicago if ever he could serve you. And that is behaving prettily, my dear, and it is a real relief to us not to dread your meeting him. So now, my Cicely, will you go to bed and to sleep, resting peacefully on your knowledge that your fight is fought, your victory won, and that God is tenderly blessing your true heart with the love of His Heart?"

Miss Braithwaite left Cis on her pillow in her pretty room, ready to sleep from weariness, relaxed, as Miss Braithwaite had suggested to her, by the knowledge that this chapter in her life was closed.

At the foot of the stairs Miss Braithwaite met Mr. Anselm Lancaster, just coming to call upon her; they were great friends.

"You look tired, dear Miss Miriam," he said at once as they shook hands. "Anything wrong?"

"No; on the contrary, something wholly right," she replied, leading the way into the library. "I've been watching the Great Cable strain, but, thank God, it has held, and I know a little bark that has all sails set for the Beautiful Land."

CHAPTER XVIII

ORIENTATION

"NOW, my dear, you must turn toward the east when you say your prayers," Miss Braithwaite briskly said to Cis the next morning at breakfast.

Cis smiled inquiringly, missing her meaning; it was one of Miss Braithwaite's highest assets that her meanings were not always obvious; they stimulated curiosity and held attention.

"I don't suppose you really mean that I'm to turn to the east?" Cis said.

"You are to face the coming day, keep your eyes on the rising sun, your back resolutely turned on the setting day," explained Miss Braithwaite. "That is called orientation, and it is your best attitude now. Indeed I don't know anyone who can afford to take any other—eyes toward the orient 'whence comes the light.'" Cis was considering this hint from Miss Braithwaite all day.

"Anyone else would tell me to brace up, or let bygones be bygones, or something of that sort, but Miss Braithwaite gives everything she says a turn that makes you begin to do what she advises, even while you're listening to her," she thought. "I'll look eastward! I'll wear blinders so I can't see, ex-

cept straight ahead! But I'll be glad when Christmas is over."

Miss Braithwaite involved Cis in preparations for a Christmas totally unlike any that she had hitherto known. There was to be a tree for her "scalawags," and it was not hard to interest Cis in this. She went with Miss Braithwaite to see her little ragged boys, and capitulated to them at once, as they did to her. It refreshed Cis to play with them, to talk to them, falling back on the vernacular which she had learned from her newsboys in those old days, hourly becoming more and more unreal to her. There was a small, peaked lame little creature of nine who won and wrung Cis's heart. She immediately began a glorious warm crimson sweater for him, on which she knit frantically every evening when she was not oversewing tarelton candy bags with bright worsteds, or assembling and gluing into place the figures for the little, but perfect "Cribs" which each child within Miss Braithwaite's orbit was to receive to take home at Christmas. She would set up a "Bethlehem" in wretched places, far enough removed in squalor and vicious ignorance from the light of the Star, the chant of the angels.

Every one of Father Morley's girls in his club was to receive a book and some of the useless, pretty things which girls covet.

"It's downright brutal to give only utilitarian things at Christmas!" declared Miss Braithwaite. "It's a joyous time, and who can be joyous over black stockings and initialed handkerchiefs? The girls must have nonsensical things; dangling, silly

vanity-feeders along with their substantial gifts from Father Morley, else Merry Christmas would be mockery said to them."

She put Cis at assorting these gifts, and, being a girl herself who was to be but twenty-two on this same Christmas, she enjoyed her task.

Mr. Lancaster often dropped in after dinner, and not infrequently to dine. They all three drew up before the vast hearth, with its jolly fire lighting up Cicely's red hair, turning it to gold-with-copper-alloy on its surface coils; making a dark warmth below its surfaces, like a low fire on a forge.

Cis did not talk much, but she listened, and, listening, found new worlds opening out before her. Both Miss Braithwaite and Mr. Lancaster had been much about Europe; they knew unfrequented corners of it as one knows the places beloved in childhood.

"Do you remember, Anselm?" Miss Braithwaite would begin, and then would follow eager reminiscences of dear, queer, crooked streets; a shrine in a cathedral; a room in an ancient palace, or, more delightful still, a sleeping village and the sweet ways of its peasants all informed with faith, the realization of God, and utter trust in Him.

Or Mr. Lancaster would exclaim: "Oh, Miss Miriam, do you recall that little wounded kid which we saw the summer you and I met in the Tyrol, and how its sad-eyed little owner carried it—at such an effort!—out to the Calvary on the hillside, and laid it at the foot of the crucifix? There was faith that

the God Who suffered to save souls would also pity His small four-footed creatures!"

"Indeed I could not easily forget it, Anselm! It was so sweet, and so piteous," Miss Braithwaite had answered. "I've always been most thankful that you came along just then! I am sure that there is one young creature in Switzerland who will carry to the grave the conviction that, together with the guardian angels, Americans are the instruments of God's mercy in answer to prayer! What a happy child that was when you bound up the kid and set its leg!"

Cicely, sitting silent on her side of the fireplace, raised her eyes and met Mr. Lancaster's look, like a boy's who has been found out in gentleness, always more mortifying to an American lad than detection in naughtiness—together with her impressions of life amid venerable, yet vividly existent faith, she was getting the revelation of two beautiful souls, the elderly woman's, the twenty-seven years younger man's, who knew and loved these things because they were part of them.

Sometimes something came up in these desultory, aimless talks which made Mr. Lancaster spring up, take a book from the shelves—Miss Braithwaite seemed to know exactly where to send him for any volume of the three thousand or so in this room—turn to a passage or a poem bearing on what had just been said, and read it aloud.

This was almost the best of all. Anselm Lancaster had a beautiful, flexible voice; he had been an Oxford man and had brought home with him

the perfect modulations and pronunciation of English which Oxford gives her sons, and he read with the feeling that an artist and lover of literature brings to a book. Cis, listening, felt that her education was just beginning; she realized what Miss Braithwaite had meant when she suggested to her that she should spend this winter in this way. Heretofore she had learned facts; now she was learning what the facts stood for, what had called them into being, and no array of facts can compare with this knowledge. It is the clothing of the dry bones which are meaningless until the spirit prophesies to them and makes them alive.

Best of all, though, were those times when Anselm Lancaster went over to Miss Braithwaite's piano, standing with its narrow end toward a book-filled corner, its keyboard toward the room, and, there in the shadow, played such exquisite music that it obliterated conscious thought, leaving no room for anything but the delight of harmonies. It was hard to go on working at these times. Miss Braithwaite's work would fall into her lap, her face rest upon her hand while she gazed into the fire with eyes that seemed to look beyond the bounds of flesh, her expression unutterably wistful. Cis, who did not understand what she heard as Miss Braithwaite did, yet was engulfed by it. Never in her short life had anything so seized her as did this music, yet, while in the elder woman it woke the longing that nothing on earth can satisfy, in the girl it called out new resolution to live and to do.

Cis talked little during these pleasant evenings,

yet she never felt, nor was excluded. Miss Braithwaite's smile was always ready for her; Mr. Lancaster included her with small services rendered her as she worked, and his eyes rested upon her as he talked, leaving her free to reply or not as she chose, and thus she, though silently for the most part, made a third in the conversation.

On the eve of Christmas Eve Mr. Lancaster came rather later than usual; Cis had decided that he was not coming and was a little disappointed. She was restless; it was hard to keep her fingers steadily employed, her mind off the thought that the morrow would have been her wedding day. Somewhere Rod was remembering this. She sent a prayer out toward him wherever he might be, that he might be blessed.

When Mr. Lancaster came in Miss Braithwaite was more than usually glad to see him.

"Welcome indeed, Anselm!" she cried. "I am glad to see you, I heartily detest telephoning, but I must arrange the details of our Christmas with you. You know that the Jesuits have High Mass at midnight? Father Morley needed persuading to it, but he yielded to our clamor for it. My ragamuffins have their tree to-morrow, at five in the afternoon —though I don't suppose you'd have suspected me of the morning five o'clock! As you're to be my Santa Claus, you'll meet me at the hall, I suppose? The tree should be all over by seven. Then you'll come home with us; we'll have a cozy dinner—*maigre*, for the vigil!—and quietly wait for the time to start for Mass. I'll drive you and Cis; the

maids are to be sent in another car. Then, after Mass, we'll wish one another a blessed Noël, and Cicely a birthday of the best gifts, and go our ways to our well-merited slumber. Do you like my programme?"

"Only an ingrate could say no, Miss Miriam," cried Anselm Lancaster. "I'll do my best to fulfil my part of it. I've an idea! Do you mind if I costume as St. Nicholas, instead of Santa Claus, and tell the boys in a few simple words who I am, what I've always done for children, and, in a word, what a fine thing it is to have a saint for their friend, instead of a fake? I think I can get it over to them, and it's rather a chance to steer them toward realities. What says the great little lady? And her lieutenant?"

"The great little lady highly approves, Anselm; it takes you to see chances to bolster up faith and morals incidentally to a frolic!" cried Miss Braithwaite.

"And—?" hinted Mr. Lancaster, waiting for Cis. "The lieutenant?"

"If I'm the great little lady's lieutenant, she thinks it's fine," Cis said. "It will be good for me, too, because I don't know much about St. Nicholas, except that somehow he stood for Santa Claus' portrait, and it didn't come near the original. Queer, but I never liked Santa Claus as well as other children did; he's too fa-stout! I hated that line that told about his shaking when he trotted around! Maybe I'd have liked him better if I'd been one of a family, and a lot of us had got ac-

quainted with him together, waiting for him to come down the chimney."

Anselm Lancaster looked pleased at this unusually long speech from Cis. Sometimes Cis wondered if he knew her story and were sorry for her. She did not mind if he knew, nor resent his possible pity. He was so simply and truly a fine gentleman that no knowledge that he possessed of another could ever seem like an intrusion.

"Good! Then St. Nicholas appears, *permissu superiorum!*" he cried. "Miss Braithwaite tells me that you are to sing, Miss Adair; out of sight, impersonating an angel, probably. I didn't know you sang."

"I don't; I'm just going to do it," Cis laughed. "If I impersonated an angel I'd be out of sight, that's sure!"

"In a slang sense?" suggested Mr. Lancaster. "Will you sing now what you'll sing then to the children, please, Miss Cis!"

"Oh, goodness!" sighed Cis, but she promptly arose. "All right; I will. It's the quickest way to prove I can't! But I can't play; Miss Braithwaite plays it."

"Not when Anselm is here," said Miss Braithwaite. "Play 'The Snow Lay on the Ground'; play it in F, and harmonize it beautifully, because I intend you to play it for Cis to-morrow night."

Anselm Lancaster sat down before the dark instrument that reflected the fire and electric light in its shining case. He struck a few chords meditatively, then he went on to play the simple, lovely

air over and over, surrounding it with new harmonies, varying it, not as a fantasia, but by holding to its simplicity, its lyric pathos, enriching it with all the possibilities of a choral.

Cis stood listening, entranced.

"Isn't that wonderful?" she sighed. "It's all there, and yet nothing is there till you bring it out! I love that hymn!"

"There's a pretty allegory tucked away in what you just said, Miss Adair, if you look for it. Now will you sing it for me?" said Mr. Lancaster, softly touching the keys.

Cis sang, and Anselm Lancaster for the unnumbered time in his knowledge of her, applauded Miss Braithwaite's wisdom. Cis had a fresh, true young voice, round and sweet, with the quality in it of a boy's; she had no method whatever, but sang as it had been given to her to sing, yet no artist could better have conveyed the effect of an unearthly narrator, telling the story of the First Christmas. It was a song like the flow of a mountain spring, or the shape of a northern pine, translated into sound.

"My dear Miss Adair, that was most beautiful!" Anselm cried sincerely. "It is exactly what it should be. You sound like one of the shepherd boys who sing that hymn on the mountains beyond Rome, or even like one of their pipes! And you speak every word so that the dullest boy will get it."

"I want them to know what it tells them," said Cis, and Mr. Lancaster noted that she made no disclaimer of his praise, as she made no pose as a

singer. She did what she was asked to do as best she could; there it began, there it ended.

"Of course they can't understand the Latin, *Venite adoremus Dominum*, but they are all baptized, and I think we catch a little Latin then, don't you? It seems to stick to us. I know Latin never seems like something I don't understand, even when I'm not understanding it, and at high school it never bothered me a bit."

"Do you know the Missal?" asked Anselm Lancaster, interested in this Cis, suddenly friendly toward him and at ease with him.

"Miss Braithwaite has been showing it to me, and all about the colors, and the vestments' meaning; I'm so glad that she has!" cried Cis eagerly. "It's so splendid, so beautiful, so big and so old! It's as if I'd been a miserable little scrap of a beggar girl and someone had taken me into a palace with rooms and rooms, and told me it was all mine! Do you know, Mr. Lancaster, it's scandalous to confess it, but I always thought there was just one Mass; every day the same, three hundred and sixty-five times a year. And here all these collects and prefaces—mercy!"

Cis waved her hands as she ended; her delight in recovering her inheritance was unmistakable.

"Now I know what Santa—I mean St. Nicholas! —must bring you!" cried Anselm Lancaster, exchanging a glance of pleasure with Miss Braithwaite.

Weary, but triumphant, having brought "her ragmuffins' Christmas tree" to a successful conclu-

sion, Miss Braithwaite took her guests home in her coupé to dine on Christmas Eve. It was another Cis from the one of the night before who sat, pale, with drooping eyes, in her golden gown with its slender line of brown fur, opposite to Mr. Lancaster, talking little, eating indifferently, her face grave, rather than sad, her smile sweet and ready, with a kind of friendly patience new to Cis.

Miss Braithwaite saw that Anselm watched her, and she, also, watched her covertly. The girl was changing fast; she was growing, deepening, expanding. At this rate she would soon be a gracious, attractive and valuable woman.

A thought new to her mind occurred to Miss Braithwaite, but she instantly dismissed it. Anselm Lancaster had seen many lovely and lovable women, in many lands; Cicely Adair could not attract him beyond his sympathetic interest in a girl who had done what she had done, had been faithful to the cause nearest his heart.

And if Cicely had been capable of attracting such a man as the scholarly and accomplished Anselm Lancaster, he was so far from her thoughts in this regard that she would never put forth the innocent wiles which are every girl's for the man whom she feels may love her, by which she awakens and feeds his attraction, according to the plan of the Creator Who made them male and female. Cis withdrew from Mr. Lancaster as a rule, as from one outside her orbit, and when she approached him it was with that admiration and trust that frankly announced her sense of remoteness. Yet it was a sweet, a

womanly Cis, with new depths in her eyes, and strength and goodness being graven upon her pale face, who sat so quietly across from Anselm Lancaster in her golden, brown-furred gown that Christmas eve at dinner.

After dinner, as usual, Miss Braithwaite repaired to her library fire. The night was cold; a sleet rain was falling, turning to ice as it fell; the fire was welcome, its warmth and its cheer needed.

"Anselm, before you begin to smoke, will you call the garage? I detest telephoning. Tell Leo to put the chains on my car, and not to fail to have it here by half past eleven; I will not drive faster than ten miles an hour to-night. Then you may light your cigar, and draw up to be agreeable to us," Miss Braithwaite commanded her guest. "Cicely, dear, is it to be for you an order that keeps perpetual silence?"

"I'm afraid no order, of any sort," said Cis arousing herself. "Fancy me not talking! But we went to confession, you see, and after that I can't say much for awhile. I'm thinking about Nannie, married to-morrow, and wondering what my birthday resolutions ought to be."

She spoke softly, sitting close beside Miss Braithwaite, but Anselm Lancaster heard her low, yet resonant voice.

He hung up the telephone receiver, and came back to the hearth. As he slipped into his waiting chair he laid on Cicely's knee a package; evidently a book.

She untied the cord and disclosed a translation

of the Missal, bound in tooled red leather, three ribbons hanging from its pages.

"Oh!" cried Cis rapturously. "Oh, Mr. Lancaster, how fine, how beautiful! Is it—" She checked herself, but, fluttering the leaves, her arrested question was answered. On the fly page was written in the close, small hand of one who wrote and thought much: "Cicely Adair. Her Lord's birthday and her own. Christmas 1922."

"Oh, thank you, thank you!" cried Cis. "You can't know how much I wanted it! Nor how I thank you! Truly, Mr. Lancaster, I'm so grateful I can't say it. To think of you're bothering with me."

"Oh, but, my dear Miss Adair! I protest! *Bothering* with you! How dreadful! And not *grateful*, you know! Aren't we friends? You must not be grateful to a friend! But I hope you'll like your Missal; of course you will! Now I'm talking nonsense, too! I wanted you to have it for the Midnight Mass. You told me you'd never been to a midnight Mass! It's supremely beautiful; the *Adeste*, and that fourth stanza at midnight: '*Ergo qui natus die hodierna.*' Will you say one tiny prayer for the Missal-giver?" cried Anselm Lancaster, so boyishly that Cis, as well as Miss Braithwaite looked surprised, and Cis said with the greatest friendliness, out of her own boyish side:

"I'll say a big one! I'll put you in with Miss Braithwaite and Nan. I'm going to receive for Nan; to-morrow is her wedding day. And someone who needs it most of all. I'll put you into my in-

tention, and if I mayn't be grateful, Mr. Lancaster, I'll be entirely ungrateful, but I'll think you're so good to me that I would be grateful if it weren't terribly wrong to be anything but ungrateful!"

Anselm Lancaster threw back his head and laughed aloud, and Miss Braithwaite joined him. Cicely's nonsense delighted her watchful friend; it was a symptom of health. Anselm Lancaster had never seen her mischievous; he found it delightful.

The church of St. Francis Xavier was crowded, but pews were held till ten minutes after midnight, and Miss Braithwaite had brought her two guests thither ten minutes before midnight tolled out from the clock on the adjoining house and school building.

The Mass was beyond words solemn and beautiful: the vestments of cloth of gold; the myriad lights; the scent of forest and incense; the great organ, the hundred choristers, the sublime music, the *Adeste Fideles*, sung with such fervor that all over the church people were sobbing with love for this inexpressibly dear hymn. With this the Mass marched on to its supreme moment, the greatest, the most inconceivable, the one infinite action of finite man, which encircles all creation, from Adam to the last born at the consummation of the world, performed in time, going on eternally.

Cicely was wrapt into something like ecstasy. The Christmas eve which she had dreaded had become the highest hour of joy which she had ever known. She was swept beyond herself into the

rapture of the angels who first sang this Gloria to which she listened.

God had tested her; she had not failed Him. Now He was rewarding her with a reward beyond her comprehension. She received this communion with her face wet with tears of joy. At last, at last she knew in Whom she had believed, blindly, yet faithfully believed.

The rain had ceased when Mass was over; the congregation came out into starlight and an ice-clad world, shining under the light.

"Oh, Merry Christmas, Merry Christmas, dear, dear Miss Braithwaite, Mr. Lancaster!" cried Cis turning back on the lower step of the church with radiant face. "Merry, merry, merry! For it's blessedly merry to be a Catholic on Christmas and to be at Mass when the little Lord comes down!"

CHAPTER XIX

THE NEW YEAR

AS THERE are fifteen minutes between tides when the ocean lies quiet at neither ebb nor flow, so the world seems to rest between Christmas and the New Year; preparations for holidays over, active work not resumed.

Cis had decided to continue as Mr. Lucas' secretary, at least until spring. Affairs in which he was interested had taken on sudden activity in ways and directions which would have made it hard for him to begin a new secretary at that time; entire fidelity to him and complete silence as to what had to transpire to his secretary were especially required now in her who filled that office. Cis knew, in spite of her lapse for Rod's sake, that her successor might easily bungle things, as she never would, or intentionally talk, to her employer's detriment. In view of Mr. Lucas' proved interest in her, Cis felt in honor bound to stand by for the present, if she could do so. Yet there was upon her a restlessness of mind that impelled her to change, any change. "It was growing pains," Miss Braithwaite told her, and Cis knew that she was right. She was growing, and the expansion of her powers called to her to give them scope.

Yet Cis was growing steadily happier in Miss

Braithwaite's home, and she knew that Miss Braithwaite thoroughly enjoyed having her there. Her sense of humor, which never could long be downed, was coming to the surface again; she made her hostess laugh with chuckling delight over her nonsense. Once more she was growing to be the frank, boyish Cis, who was excellent company and attractive to all sorts of people. With this revival of her old charm, Cis was acquiring the charm of one who lives intimately in the best companionship. She read eagerly, with Miss Braithwaite to guide her choice of books; she listened no less eagerly, and began to share talk as valuable as her reading. She met interesting people, and heard discussed measures of great import, helpful to individuals and to her country. She began to drift up to the edges of these things and to help in them, ever so little, but learning to do, to plan; being, unknown to herself, inducted into the great things now waiting on every hand for lay men and women to perform.

Father Morley came often to see Miss Braithwaite; he relied on her acumen, her remarkable powers for help in his undertakings. He, a tired man, not particularly strong, delighted in the refreshment he received in her restful library, from her own wit and gracious talk; from her brain which understood at a half word much that he could not say. She put at his disposal all her resources of talent and wealth and social position.

Father Morley was himself a person of rare cultivation of mind; he had been an omnivorous reader

from his childhood; his remarkable education began long before his seminary days, exceeded textbooks.

He found Cis interesting; he recognized in her that capacity to soar which so far surpasses the sufficient goodness of excellent souls, and he made it his affair to help Miss Braithwaite to hold up Cicely's opening wings. She grew deeply attached to this tenderly kind, austere Jesuit, and yielded herself gratefully to his molding.

Thus the winter swung into its steady pace after the New Year, and Cis was amazed to find that her days were not only peaceful, but full to overflowing, and that they were happy. There was an ache in her heart for Rodney; she did not forget, yet being an honest Cis, she realized that if he were to return to her he would not satisfy her as he had done; that in severing herself from Rodney Moore she had leaped over on to a height beyond him, and that from that hour she had gone on ascending.

How strange it was that in doing right she had gained in time the good that had been promised her only for eternity! There was that ache in her heart for Rodney—what woman would not mourn a lost love, perhaps the more that she began to see the loss in its true light—but the Cis who had been for a quarter of a year the inmate of Miss Braithwaite's house, associated with her and her friends, had grown beyond the girl who had been satisfied with Rodney Moore.

As the winter evenings grew cold and drear, Anselm Lancaster sought no less frequently the cheer-

ful fireside, the laden shelves, the grand piano of Miss Braithwaite's library; still more the delightful fireside talk of its mistress, whom he admired with all his might.

And Cis herself? Did he find her an attraction? Sometimes Miss Braithwaite thought so, but Cis surely did not. However, she had grown friendly and at ease with Anselm Lancaster, chatted with him, showed him her natural gifts, as well as the supernatural ones developing in her; was her frank, sunny self, and of course Anselm was not so stupid as not to find her likable, admirable. But there was no ground for seeing more in it than that, Miss Braithwaite decided, perhaps with relief.

He talked to Cis of the things which interested him; of his work, his plans. Of his home, which he made a temporary home for those who had left home and relatives for conscience' sake, who needed a foothold upon which to stand to catch the breath of the new atmosphere when the old had become too vitiated for them to continue to breathe it. Of his Italian classes, his organized effort to hold the immigrant against assault in the new land; of all the ramifications of his lay army to fight against Lucifer, the once-beautiful, the forever subtle and attractive.

Cis listened enkindled.

"It is splendid, glorious!" she cried. "If I stay in Beaconhite will you teach me how to do, and put me at something? I've got to pay back, a little, somehow!"

"You could do anything with the Italians. Miss

Adair. Will you study the language? It isn't hard to learn it. And you could do much else; you're a dynamic creature. But '*if* you stay in Beaconhite'? Aren't you sure of staying?" cried Mr. Lancaster.

"Not a bit," declared Cis. "I don't know what I may do, but this isn't quite my own life. I love Miss Braithwaite a little more each day; I'd be thankful to go on here forever, if she needed me. She is greater than any other woman; there's just one of her! But I don't mean much here. I think there must be a place for me somewhere that will be my very own, something that I was meant to do. Sometimes I think I'll go home where I came from, but that isn't sensible, either. Oh, I don't know! I'll know, I suppose, when the time comes."

"That's good sense and good theology—which is tantamount, though lots of people don't know it," said Mr. Lancaster. "It seems to me that you have a decidedly real place here, as you put it. Miss Braithwaite is strong and active, but at sixty-five the goal is in sight. It seems to me that to stay on here, companion her, look after her, work in with her in her numerous ways of usefulness till you can carry them on alone as she drops out, is an opportunity anyone might welcome. Miss Braithwaite is a power for good; there is no one whom I admire more, and everyone, from the bishop of the diocese to that small lame boy in whom you are interested, turns to her for help. To prolong such a life and make it happier—of course there is no better way to prolong life than by making it a happy life—it

seems to me I'd think several times before I decided that was not a worth while chance for a young thing like you!"

Cis returned the smile that Mr. Lancaster bent upon her, but she said:

"That all sounds beautiful, and it is more than worth while; the only trouble is that I can't imagine my doing it! I wonder where Miss Braithwaite is? Don't I hear Ellen bringing someone in here?"

Ellen pushed open the heavy doors of the library.

"Miss Lucas and Mr. Lucas, Miss Braithwaite," she announced, and Cis looked up to see Mr. Wilmer Lucas coming forward, and behind him Jeanette Lucas.

"Oh, Miss Lucas!" Cis cried, and ran forward to greet Miss Lucas on a sort of track of red wool, trailing her crimson knitting by a needle caught in the fold of her gown, the little lame lad's sweater which she was just finishing.

"Oh, Miss Lucas, I am so glad to see you! Ellen, please find Miss Braithwaite; she may be in her room. How kind of you to bring your niece here, Mr. Lucas! You know Mr. Lancaster? Miss Lucas, this is Miss Braithwaite's friend, Mr. Lancaster."

"I'm truly glad to see you, Miss Adair," said Miss Lucas in that unforgettable sweet voice of hers. "And to see you so happy here. Uncle Wilmer has been telling me that he is grateful to father and me for sending you to him."

The two girls stood, their hands still clasped, looking at each other, both remembering where and

how they had parted, the singular bond that united them, all that had come to pass since they had met.

Jeanette Lucas looked years older; her face had lost its sweetness; it was as beautiful as ever—Cis thought that she had forgotten how lovely it was—but older lines, which barely escaped being bitter ones, had been graven on each side of her delicate lips, and her eyes were introspective, no longer meeting other eyes with ready sympathy. Her wound had gone deep, the cruel wound of finding unworthy someone whom one has utterly trusted, and of learning to unlove. She had withdrawn into herself to hide her hurt.

Jeanette Lucas saw the girl who had been merry, frank and free, grown older, too, but in every way bettered by it. Never precisely pretty, Cis's face had sweetened and softened; its whole effect was of a face that had been clarified and ennobled. Dressed in soft dull gold and brown, her wonderful hair topped the harmony of color like an aureole; in undefined motions, intonations, Cis had refined, become one of the world in which Jeanette Lucas had been born and always lived.

Miss Braithwaite, hurrying in, interrupted this unconscious scrutiny of each other which absorbed the girls in oblivion to all else. She welcomed Jeanette cordially, even affectionately, putting her at once into Cicely's chair close to hers before the fire.

Anselm Lancaster dropped into his usual place; Mr. Lucas, in a capacious chair in the middle. For a moment Cis hesitated, then she took a low stool

and put herself close on the other side of Jeanette. It seemed to her that Anselm Lancaster found Miss Lucas interesting, and instantly Cis's busy brain began to weave a plot to which the happy ending was intrinsic.

"Father is perfectly well, thank you, Miss Braithwaite," Jeanette was replying to Miss Lucas. "We went abroad on my account, but he profited from it more than I—except as it added to my knowledge. Father already had enough knowledge of pictures and architecture. We had a delightful trip, yes, thanks; England, France, Italy; Spain, to a limited extent. I'd like to go back. Why not go with me, Miss Adair?"

"I am going; I'm saving up to go," said Cis unexpectedly; Jeannette had not been in earnest. "I'm getting ready for it in other ways; Miss Braithwaite and Mr. Lancaster talk about Europe so much that I almost know which corner to turn to buy shoe-strings, or to see the best pictures in the gallery! I'll show you the way around Europe, Miss Lucas, if you will let me go with you."

"Miss Adair can show you many other things besides the way around Europe, Jeanette!" Mr. Lucas corroborated Cis. "If ever the day dawns that I'm not involved in crises of several corporations and public affairs, simultaneously, I'll take you both abroad; Miss Braithwaite shall go as duenna and Mr. Lancaster as cicerone."

"A contract, before witnesses!" cried Mr. Lancaster. "I want to show you a picture in Florence for which you might have sat as model, Miss Lucas."

"How delightful! I'll keep the appointment, Mr. Lancaster," said Jeanette. "Miss Braithwaite, do you know why I'm here to-day?"

"Because you knew how glad I'd be to see my little Jeanette again?" suggested Miss Braithwaite.

"Dear Miss Braithwaite, I hope you are!" said Jeanette, touching Miss Braithwaite's hand. "That's dear of you, but that's not why. We are in desperate straits for a housekeeper. She must not be an ordinary person, but someone quite extraordinary. Father is going away, to be gone a year; possibly more. Mother is in wretchedly bad health; father will not leave to me the responsibility for that great house of ours, the children and the servants; rightly or wrongly, he doesn't consider me competent to it. He wants a woman higher above suspicion than Cæsar's wife; competent to take charge; good, and she should not be a common person, or the servants will not obey her, and I doubt that the children would; they're keen-eyed little animals! I suggested to father that he had these qualities compounded in a laboratory, and the form containing them somehow galvanized into the semblance of a living human being, but he said: 'Before we resort to such extreme measures to get the unlikely person we want, you run over to visit your uncle at Beaconhite, and see Miss Miriam Braithwaite. She is a such a good Roman that she has acquired some of St. Peter's quality of fisher of men; she has all sorts of ramifications out, and no end of all kinds of people on her lines. Quite possibly she may know precisely the person we need,

and one who equally needs us.' So here I am, Miss Braithwaite, at your mercy."

"Dear me, that's a hard order to fill! Can you suggest anyone, Anselm?" began Miss Braithwaite, when Cis interrupted with an exclamation.

"Miss Gallatin!" she cried. "Nice, queer, splendid Miss Hannah Gallatin!"

"The very person! But why do you think she'd go, Cicely?" said Miss Braithwaite. "She takes boarders, and is going on well, I think?"

"I'm sure she perfectly detests taking boarders," insisted Cis. "I believe she'd love to be with people like the Lucases, with children to help bring up, and someone she'd love, like Miss Jeanette! I'm sure she's horribly lonely; she was dear and good to me; she would adore Miss Jeanette. Wouldn't it be all right to ask her?"

"I am sure that Miss Adair has hit it!" cried Mr. Lancaster, rising. "I know Miss Gallatin well, and she is lonely, and she does loathe her present surroundings. I'm going home; I pass near her house. Would you like me to sound her for you, Miss Lucas?"

"I'd be most grateful," returned Jeanette. "Though it makes my head whirl to find the impossible right around the corner, turning possible under my eyes! I had no idea of getting so much as a clue to a person!"

"This is the House of the Thaumaturgi; you see your friend, Miss Adair, is getting their powers; this suggestion was hers," said Mr. Lancaster, and said good night.

"Now you two children take each other off somewhere, and compare notes on these past months since you met," ordered Miss Braithwaite. "I suspect you want to see each other, and I know that I want to talk to Mr. Lucas, now that he has delivered himself into my hands!"

"She doesn't realize how little I really know you," Cis said apologetically, as she led Jeanette to her own room.

"Neither do I!" retorted Jeanette. "I think we agreed that circumstances had made us friends beyond common measures of time and opportunity. May I speak like an old friend? May I call you Cis; will you call me Jeanette? That's right! You have changed a great deal, Cis; you are wonderfully changed. So am I, but not for the better, like you. My uncle has told me what you have done. My dear, my dear, I am proud of you, and ashamed of me! You have been brave, faithful, and you are not whining! I've been bitter, awfully, horribly bitter, Cis! I hope it's better now. I've been feeling that it wasn't fair, what happened to me. I suspect it hurt my pride. I felt insulted, dragged down, as if God had dealt unfairly with me."

"Oh, my, no!" cried Cis. "God doesn't deal unfairly; why would He? You wouldn't. But any girl would feel insulted in your place; it's a shame! I thought so then, and I've been thinking so ever since. But it wasn't God's fault, you know. Don't you suppose God saved you from worse sorrow?"

"Yes, I do! He sent you, true-hearted and courageous, to interfere for me!" cried Jeanette.

"Cis, I've blessed you before every shrine I visited in Europe and here!"

"Then it's likely that you saved me in your turn, Jeanette. I might easily have slipped my cable; likely you helped me hold," said Cis simply.

"Do you know what *you* have done, Cicely of the burnished hair? You have impressed my uncle Wilmer by your action, coming as it did on top of my great father's choice of the Old Church, Miss Braithwaite, and other people and things. He is looking into the Church; he never would before! He told me he was going to satisfy himself just what this strange power rested upon that made ordinary people martyrs and saints! He is a prejudiced, strong-willed man, Cis, but he is an honest one, and you know what happens when honest people begin this study. Your hand set this in motion, Cicely Adair!" cried Jeanette.

Cis looked up, then she looked down, for tears stood in her eyes.

"Would you really call it my hand?" she asked.

"Ah, well, the nails which hold the wall together do not drive themselves," said Jeanette. "Cis, do you remember Mr. Singer, of the telephone office at home? I saw him lately; he asked about you. He told me that, although he was forced to dismiss you from the office for what you did, because it was a flagrant break of their rules, still he admired you exceedingly for it, as well as for your qualities as he knew them. He said that they were making a department of welfare work for their employees, and that he knew no one whom he would so well

like to have over it as you. He said that if I came in contact with you he should be grateful if I would tell you this, and ask you to communicate with him. He said that he wanted a girl of high character, integrity, kindness, and someone able to entertain and attract the girls whom she looked after; he added that you were the one above all others whom he had in mind. So I'm handing on the message, in spite of disloyalty to Uncle Wilmer! You can think it over. At least your dismissal, Cicely, is thus squared off! Mr. Singer did not betray that he knew it was I who was involved in your violation of the rule of the company, but I'm sure that he did. Do you want to come home again, Cis? It's good for you to be here, but I'm selfish enough to wish you were at home again."

"That was nice of Mr. Singer; thank you for telling me, Jeanette. I don't know what I want to do; I'm all at loose ends in my mind, but I think, after I've boiled for awhile, I'll settle down; not boil over," said Cis.

"It takes a long time to get one's bearings after an earthquake," agreed Jeanette. "I've been wretched, unhappy, bitter, bewildered; I'm better. But, Cis, you don't look like any of these things; you look good, sweet and good, and—well, *clear* is the word! It isn't going to be a vocation, is it?"

"For a convent? Oh, no; I'm afraid not. I'm not that sort; I'm active. Do you suppose there ever was a red-haired contemplative? Even though the hair was cut off when she was professed? I doubt it! You were always so good!" cried Cis.

"I don't know, I don't know! I wish I might go," cried Jeanette. "It seems mean to offer yourself to God because a man failed you."

"It wouldn't be that; it would be that a man showed you that only God was worth loving," Cis corrected her with the insight that was new to her. "If God wanted you, why would you care how He got you? I can see that there are all sorts of ways."

"My dear, my dear, you have travelled far in a short while!" said Jeanette; then sighed and smiled. "We have come to the end of our talk; there is no more after that. Come back to Miss Braithwaite and my uncle."

"Anselm Lancaster called up, Jeanette and Cis," Miss Braithwaite said as the girls came back into the library. "He says that Miss Gallatin was overjoyed at the suggestion of getting away from her detested business and looking after Lucases of assorted sizes. She is coming to see you, here, in the morning, Jeanette. You are to stay the night; I've arranged with your uncle, and I only hope that you may carry off with you that pearl of great price, Hannah Gallatin."

Miss Gallatin and Jeanette Lucas saw each other with perceiving eyes in the morning, and Jeanette went with Miss Gallatin in Miss Braithwaite's coupé to find Mr. Lucas in his office to arrange for the speediest winding up of Miss Gallatin's affairs.

"You had an inspiration, Cis," declared Miss Braithwaite when Jeanette Lucas had gone home again from Beaconhite, with all arrangements made for Miss Gallatin to follow her. "A lonely

woman, and a home that needs her. Jeanette Lucas will gain much from Miss Gallatin, and Hannah Gallatin will be lonely no more."

"I wonder—" Cis began, and stopped.

"Yes?" Miss Braithwaite waited.

"If I had another inspiration?" Cis went on. "May I say it? I wondered if Mr. Lancaster would not fall in love with Jeanette Lucas, and whether it would not be beautiful if he did?"

Miss Braithwaite stared, then she laughed.

"She's a lovely creature, and I'd not blame anyone for falling in love with her—you have fallen a wee bit in love with her yourself! But, Cis, my dear, are you getting to be a matchmaker? That's a sign of old age, poor Cis! Why, I'm not nearly old enough to try to pair people off—or am I old enough to know it's a risky business, besides being hard to work? That would be a pretty pair, I admit, and suitable. Well, well; possibly! Then you think my beloved Anselm is good enough even for Jeanette Lucas?"

"For anyone; too good for almost anyone else," said Cis promptly. "Miss Braithwaite, Jeanette said that she told you about the telephone welfare department at home, and Mr. Singer's selecting me to run it. What ought I do?"

"Come to dinner," said Miss Braithwaite instantly, winding her arm around Cis to take her to the dining room. "And stay where you are till you get marching orders which can't be forged. Dear me, are young girls the only ones that have a claim? How about an old girl who needs you? Stay with

me, Cecily Adair, at least till you can endure me no longer! You're a bright spot of comfort, my child, and I like to see your red hair beside my red fire on the hearth!"

CHAPTER XX

THE OLD BOTTLE FOR NEW WINE

THE winter slipped away, melting into spring, and Cis had not left Beaconhite. Increasingly interested in her completely transformed life, growing daily fonder of Miss Braithwaite, Cicely continued to serve Mr. Lucas happily in his office, finding the great matters constantly beneath her fingers more and more intriguing, going at night back into that peacefully beautiful house, into its books, its charming talk, its lofty ideals.

"I'm getting nicer and nicer!" Cis mocked herself one night in her own room, before her mirror. It was perfectly true; she was "getting nicer" and was becoming something far more than her adjective conveyed.

When June came Miss Braithwaite announced to Cis that she was to take a vacation of three months and go with her touring the New England coast and the White Mountains.

"I don't know whether we shall go on up to Montreal or not; it shall be as we feel when the time comes. We will stop where we please, for as long as we please, and we will not measure our trip by miles but by satisfactions," Miss Braithwaite said. Cis caught her breath in delight.

"Gracious!" she exclaimed. "What a suggestion!

It is rather flooring! But how can I go? I'll lose my job! Mr. Lucas can't hold on to a secretary who is flying all over New England!"

"Easily," replied Miss Braithwaite. "If you can broadcast a song by radio, you can broadcast a secretary by automobile! I'm not one bit afraid of your losing your job; besides, I've sounded Mr. Lucas!"

Cis laughed. "Trust you to secure yourself—and me!" she cried. "Miss Braithwaite, I'll probably die of joy on the way; simply blow right up in the car."

"Let us hope that the car will not blow up with you and me both in it!" retorted Miss Braithwaite, well pleased with Cis's pleasure. "It is quite settled that we are to spend the summer on wheels. I want you to see the ocean breaking over the rocks of that coast, you who have seen the ocean only as it comes up on New Jersey sands. I want you to hear it cannonade into those rock-caves, and retreat from them in foam and spray. You're too enthusiastic to miss a note of that vast harmony. Anselm Lancaster says if we go he will drive after us and join us somewhere for July and August."

"How fine!" cried Cis, frankly delighted. "That will keep us from missing the hearth, if we are inclined to. Mr. Lancaster will make it homelike, and how nice it will be for you to have him there to talk to!"

Miss Braithwaite was regarding Cis sharply; she said:

"Nice for you, too, will it not be? In case I'm

in a lazy mood, he can drive you to any point that you should see."

"I'd hate to bother him," said Cis. "But of course it will be great for me to have him with us. He's no end good to me, takes me right in, because you do. Will he go alone?"

"He didn't speak of anyone else; I don't know. He's extremely fond of that recent convert who was an Episcopalian minister, Paul Ralph Randolph. Paul is having a hard time; perhaps Anselm will ask him to go with him. Then it's settled, Cicely. I've spoken to Mr. Lucas, but you'd better speak of it to him in the morning."

Miss Braithwaite turned away as she spoke, and met Father Morley just coming in.

After a few words with him, Cis ran away to write to Nan, and Miss Braithwaite laid before the Jesuit her summer plan.

When she told him that Anselm Lancaster was likely to be added to the party, Father Morley lifted his eyebrows inquiringly, without a word.

"Yes, of course," Miss Braithwaite agreed with him. "I see, but I don't know, truly. I do know that the idea never crosses Cicely's mind, and so, though I understand how and why the approaches to her mind are guarded against the entrance of the idea, still, it does seem to me that there can't be ground for our entertaining it. It's hard for me to believe in the novel heroine who has no suspicion that she is sought until the hero plumps himself down on his knees at her feet! I think, as a rule, a woman feels even the dawn of interest in her, the

power of her attraction, before any onlooker can sense it."

"If she doesn't subtly suggest to him that he admires her?" suggested Father Morley, with his quizzical half-smile.

"You've been reading George Bernard Shaw!" cried Miss Braithwaite.

"Nonsense! I'm ashamed of you! Thackeray said it before he did, but in point of fact one needs to read neither of them to know that law of natural history," said Father Morley. "Well, and if Cicely's preoccupation were wrong, and our half-formed suspicion were right, how about it? Would it do?"

"At first I thought not, when it occurred to me," said Miss Braithwaite. "I do not believe that two people can be happy together if the door to the deepest tastes and feelings of one will not yield to the hand of the other. To my mind it is madness to expect life to be anything but galling when it is lived in close proximity to a person to whom one may not speak of the things nearest to the heart whether for lack of sympathy in tastes or, still more, in principles. But I have come to think that, in this case, there would not be that lack; Cicely has an excellent mind, and rare perception; her big heart and loyal truth are rare. I am coming to think that it would do exceedingly well, and to fear that it may never happen. Would you approve it, Father?"

"Oh, yes; yes, indeed! I make it a rule to approve everything of that sort to which there is no actual objection. I've found that is the easiest way

to an end that is sure to be reached, whatever I say," replied Father Morley with his quiet smile, his eyes laughing at Miss Braithwaite's chagrin at his provoking lack of enthusiasm.

"Well, I assure you it would be a lucky man who married Cis. She is a splendid girl," Miss Braithwaite declared, as Cis came back in time to catch the last five words.

"I hope you're talking of Cis Adair?" she cried.

"As it happens, I was," said Miss Braithwaite.

"At least I'm a fortunate girl," said Cis quietly.

Father Morley smiled at her with genuine admiration.

"It is always a lucky person who may truthfully be called splendid; assuming that it is luck that carves character, which is at least open to debate."

"My funny little character lay down and let two skillful pairs of hands carve it," said Cis with a grateful smile for these two people who had such a large part in her recent molding.

The summer passed in the way Miss Braithwaite had planned, a summer of such delight to Cis that each night when she lay down to sleep she wondered if it were really she, Cicely Adair, who was passing through scenes of natural beauty, such as she had never seen, in a luxurious car, with a companion who enhanced every beauty by her talk, linking it with other beauty, playing upon it with her wit and wisdom. When the mood was upon them they halted in a fine hotel, where Cis came into contact with a world that she had not known; where at night she danced in her pretty, thin frocks,

her glorious hair the observed of every eye, moving to orchestras that played perfect dance music perfectly.

The girl drank deep of youthful joy and blossomed under it. She moved with a new grace added to her natural lissom, free carriage, and her face, alive with the interests filling her quick brain, transformed by suffering largely outlived, a temptation conquered, a soul at peace and knowing its way, was so attractive that no one ever stopped to consider whether or not she was beautiful.

Anselm Lancaster had fulfilled his promise and had joined Miss Braithwaite on the north shore, beyond Boston, in July. His roadster sometimes followed, sometimes preceded Miss Braithwaite's large car, driven by her man, and Paul Ralph Randolph, the convert whom older Catholics were honoring for his sacrifices for conscience, with the ready admiration those born in the Church are quick to accord a convert, was Anselm Lancaster's companion on the trip. Sometimes Miss Braithwaite rode with Anselm, Cis and Mr. Randolph in the big car; sometimes Cis went with Anselm in the roadster, while Miss Braithwaite welcomed Mr. Randolph to a place beside her and to the profound satisfaction which her wise talk gave the young man, hard beset on the new-old road, from which he had no temptation to turn back.

Thus they went through the loveliness of the Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Maine coasts, turned off into the White Mountain region, but omitted for this time the Canadian possibility.

Thus they made their way leisurely down again, through the Berkshires, back to Beaconhite, just as the children were trooping to school, and the hint of summer's passing, autumn's approach, was in the air.

Miss Braithwaite was no wiser as to the future event which she had discussed with Father Morley than she had been in setting forth. Of Cis she was entirely sure; she had no thought in her mind of that which her friend considered for her. Of Anselm she was less sure, yet he gave her no actual ground for supposing that he perceived Cis in any different light from that in which Miss Braithwaite saw her as a dear, lovely, lovable and noble girl. Miss Braithwaite knew quite well that it is a totally other matter to want to marry a girl, than to see in her all sorts of desirable traits.

They had not been back in Beaconhite quite two weeks when two things happened to change the direction of Miss Braithwaite's plans, and Cicely's, no less.

An old friend of Miss Braithwaite's, living in California, was desperately ill and begged her friend to come to her. Miss Braithwaite was going; she could not, nor would not refuse.

Then Cis had a letter from Nan imploring her to come back to her old home in October. There would be a little boy, or a little girl, there then whose godmother Cis, and no one else, must be. Nan implored Cis to come to see her before her baby was born, and to stay on to sponsor it at the font. Miss Braithwaite had intended leaving Cis

her house and servants to look after while she was gone, but this news from Nan focused Cicely's vague intention to return to her old home, and she decided to go back when Miss Braithwaite went away.

"You will come back to me, Miss Adair?" Mr. Lucas had said when she told him that for a while, at least, she would not return to her desk.

"I hope so, Mr. Lucas; I suppose so," Cis said. "Miss Braithwaite wants me to come back when she gets home. If her friend dies, as seems likely, she will be saddened, and may need me a little bit when she comes home. I'm pretty sure to come back."

"Whoever may be in your place, I will gladly exchange for you when you come," said Mr. Lucas. "Promise me not to tell Jeanette a secret when you see her! I am not ready for them to know it, but you have a right to be told before you go. Your extraordinary choice of your Church when everything called you from her, impressed me to such an extent that I made up my mind to find out what was in her thus to raise people above themselves. I have been investigating it. I want to tell you, Cicely Adair, that I have found out."

"Oh, Mr. Lucas!" cried Cis jumping up with a radiant face. "I'm so glad, so glad! And I must tell you that you've no idea how much you'll like the Church when you can stop investigating her, when you begin just to live with her! I'd no sort of idea how splendid she was! I'm so glad I have her, that now I think I didn't sacrifice a thing then

—though it did hurt at the time, and I came horribly near slipping off."

Mr. Lucas laughed. "That's not a bad tribute to your Mother, my dear," he said, "though it's a bit funny. I'm quite sure that I shall find her precisely what you say 'when I begin to live with her'!"

Miss Braithwaite went to California. Anselm Lancaster took Cis to the train to see Miss Braithwaite off, and then, an hour later, put Cis on her train to return to her home.

" 'Always the best of friends,' Miss Cis, like Joe Gargery and little Pip, aren't we?" he asked, holding Cis's hand for a dallying moment of farewell.

"Yes, indeed, if you'll keep up your half of it, though I don't know Joe Gargery, nor little Pip," Cis said.

"That doesn't matter; they were the best of friends; that's the salient point," Anselm said. "And I don't want you to forget that so are we. You'll come back this winter, when Miss Braithwaite comes?"

"I don't know; I think so, if she wants me. I'll miss her—and you—and the dear library; the whole wonderful house and my life in it, and all the kindness I've had, and the untellable things I've learned. Oh, I shall miss it all!" Cis choked.

"Only for a visit; you're going only for a visit! Beaconhite holds you on the other end of a tether! Good-bye, Miss Cicely. I'm afraid the sunshine goes out with your hair." Anselm pressed Cicely's hand hard, put into her lap a book and a box of candy, together with a long box with a protruding

ribbon over one side, all of which Cis had pretended not to see, though she knew quite well what their purpose was, and she felt a girlish satisfaction in being thus freighted and sped.

The train rolled out of the station, and Cis was on her way home.

It was a long, tiresome journey, but it gave Cis time to consider her history since she had made the same journey in the reverse direction. A lifetime lay between the journeys, it seemed to her. Basically she was the same Cicely Adair who had come to Beaconhite to try her fortune; in her on that day had lain the potential qualities and attitudes of mind which these months had brought out, but so tremendous had been all that had happened to her, so far-reaching in its effect—reaching as far as all eternity—that it was by no means the same Cis who was going back to Nan.

At the station, when Cis arrived in the growing dusk, a young man came forward to greet her. He was attired in such perfection that his effort to appear at his best positively screamed aloud to all passers-by. Cis did not know him, and, though he was bearing down on her, it was with a hesitation, in spite of his advance toward her, that spoke a like uncertainty in him. Only when he came quite up to her did Cis cry:

"Well, Tom! Tom Dowling! To think of my not knowing you! Nice of you to come!"

"I wasn't sure of you, Cis," said Tom uneasily. "You're—you're awfully different!"

"That's true, I am," said Cis. "But you've grown

up since I saw you. You're not bigger; I don't mean that, but you're grown up!"

"Right you are!" declared Tom with a slight swagger. "But I'm hardly any younger than you; don't try to talk like a grandmother! Girls get old quicker. You've what is it? Side?"

"Goodness, is it?" laughed Cis. "Aren't we going somewhere, Tom? We aren't going to stay here all night, are we? It was good of Nan to send you to meet me."

"*Good!* Of *Nan!* To *send* me!" Tom cried in a series of small explosions. "Gosh! As though a man had no mind of his own! As though Nan sent me, like a kid! I tell you, Cis, I've hardly been able to sleep since I heard you were coming, for fear I'd miss meeting your train! I tell you, Cis, it's been hard sledding with you gone, and if I've grown old it's from missing you, if you want to know!"

"Well, Tom! That's a dear boy to remember Cis so hard," said Cis, falling back into her old boyish way of speaking, association with the place and with the lad to whom she had returned, calling it out. But she found this earnestness of Tom's wearisome, and devoutly wished that he had not been so loyal to her memory.

"Come over to the taxi stand," said Tom. "Here, give over that suitcase. Checks?"

"One check, one small trunk," said Cis yielding up her case and check to this protector.

Tom handed her check to an expressman, and gave him the address of Nan's house. Then he re-

sumed his way toward the taxi stand, holding Cis by one elbow.

As he put her into the cab, and entered it himself he said:

"Say, Nan has a son; three days old, he is. She wouldn't let them telegraph you for fear you'd hold off coming a little. But she told me to tell you that she was so crazy to see you that it would do her more good to have you walk in than even to see the baby! And heaven knows, she's wild over him, though, honest; he's not such a much! I never saw one so young, and I think age improves 'em more'n it does wine."

"Oh, Tom, of course she's wild over her baby son!" cried Cis. "I'm going to be wild over him myself! He's to be one third mine; Nan said so. He's my godson, or will be, as soon as we can get him made so. What's his name?"

"Matt, Matthew, for Joe's father; I'm not keen for it," said Tom. "Joe wanted it, and Nan always likes to please him, so it's Matt. Nan wanted him called Cyril."

"I like Matt better; Cyril is too dressy for Nan's boy; she's such a simple, dear little mouse!" said Cis decidedly. "Oh, Tom, here we are!"

"Well, Cis, dear, didn't you think if the taxi went on running we'd get here?" asked Tom, intending to be humorous, and helping Cis out.

Nan held out her arms when Cis came up the stairs, running to her headlong.

"Oh, Cis; oh, Cis! I'm so glad!" Nan cried, and Cis kissed her with tears, repeatedly.

Nan a wife and now a mother! Not only for Cis had these months been full of changes. Nan had a son to praise God for, but Cis—what had she? Less? No; more! A son was another soul to rejoice over, but Cis felt that the creation of her soul was a wonder greater than ordinary birth.

Nan looked at her with appraising eyes, as Cis arose from her knees beside her, covered over the face of tiny Matt, held in the hollow of his mother's arm, and fell back a step or two, looking down on Nan.

"Cis, you have changed! But it is all for the better!" cried Nan. "You don't look one bit unhappy; your eyes are lovely, dear! and you are—what is it? Like a very fine, fine lady, Cis! You've written me of your lovely friend, that wonderful Miss Braithwaite, and her house, and her friends, but—what has happened to you?"

"Everything, Nan! I am happy, but I'm still more thankful. It has been a miracle-time for me, more so, even, than for you. I'll tell you when I may; you must not be tired. I'm quite all right, Nannie; be sure of that," said Cis.

"You look it," said Nan slowly. "It will not tire me to hear it all to-night. Mother is here. Go down and find her, and have your tea. Joe will be home in a few minutes."

Cis went down. Mrs. Dowling greeted her with her old manner of uncertainty as to what Cis might be about to do next, but it rapidly gave way to wonder, and then to constraint. Cis did not intend to produce any such effect, nor was

she conscious that she did so, but about her was the fine atmosphere of Miss Braithwaite's house, and her recent associations with minds and souls informed with knowledge, divine and human. Mrs. Dowling began half to fear Cis, and then to entertain a hope that Tom, whose infatuation for Cis had always distressed her, might find favor in the eyes of this charming girl, whose pretty clothes were worn with an air, whose pretty manners were wholly unconscious.

That evening Cis was allowed to spend an hour with Nan; she drew a low chair beside her, laid her godson, a roll of soft white wool, across her knees, and made ready to talk.

"Cis, dear, am I to know what happened?" asked Nan timidly. "I saw Mr. Moore when he was here, looking for you. I could not understand, but evidently he could not, either. What was wrong? Or do you mind telling me?"

"No. I expected to tell you, Nannie. I did mind writing about it. It is all right now; I am thankful to say that I'm happy, as I told you I was, and I can talk about it."

Then Cis told, simply, but completely, the story of her engagement and its breaking, giving more expression to her own fight against temptation than she had ever done to Miss Braithwaite.

Nan listened with wide eyes, breathless, not interrupting. When Cis ended, with a long breath of relief that the story was told, Nan put out her hand and softly touched Cis, her eyes full of tears, but fuller of adoring love.

"To think that I used to be afraid you were not a good Catholic!" she said. "To think that I imagined that I was a better one than you were, I, who never in all my life suffered one little pang for my faith! Why, Cis; why, Cis, dearest! I'm so glad I know you! And I'm so glad that little Matthew will have you for a godmother! I am almost sure that he will be a priest, and may be a saint!"

"You little ninny-Nanny!" cried Cis, jumping up, almost forgetting the baby, but saving him from a fall by a clutch on the outer layer of his many envelopes. "You must be getting tired; a little light-headed! I'm going off. If ever you say anything so silly to me as that again I'll cut your acquaintance, and ungodmother your son! So there!"

She kissed Nan good night, gave her little son to her, and ran off to her own room.

"They're nice, good people, and Nan is a darling, always was, but—Beaconhite seems like home, not here, and no one here seems to me like anyone I ever knew well," thought Cis; she looked sadly at herself in the mirror as she braided her glowing hair.

There is no exile so remote, no loneliness so profound as the return to old associations which have been completely outgrown.

CHAPTER XXI

THE WEAVING

CIS stayed on, living on the surface of her little native city. Miss Braithwaite was still in California; she wrote that she could not tell how long she might be detained; it seemed probable that it would be for all of the winter, or its greater part. Her friend was dying slowly in the lingering agonies of the most agonizing of all diseases; she clung to Miss Braithwaite, praying her not to leave her, and Miss Braithwaite had promised to stay to help her to die. Cis suspected it was also to teach her how to die; that she was less versed than Miss Braithwaite in the science of the saints.

With Miss Braithwaite gone, Cis had no desire to return to Beaconhite; it was not the place, it was that home and its mistress for which Cis longed, for the lack of which she felt lost.

Mr. Singer had found out that Cicely Adair had returned, and he hunted her up, imploring her to take up his work with his telephone girls, help to organize the measures which he was trying to put on foot for their welfare. Cis agreed to undertake this work, but only with the understanding that she was free to lay it down at any time. Her experience under Miss Braithwaite, in Father Morley's Girls' Club, in the many good works which occupied her

Beaconhite friends, stood Cis in good stead now; she did well with Mr. Singer's girls, and was interested in them. It was strange and amusing to have gone away, dismissed by the Telephone Company for a breach of law, and return to be placed over their employees' pretty rooms for recreation and rest, installed as the hostess, friend and guide of these girls.

Cis visited Jeanette Lucas often; the two girls were strongly drawn to each other; their friendship deepened and grew. Jeanette had come out of her trial with a darkened outlook upon life. Cis had come out of her struggle and loss undismayed, strengthened, in a sense refreshed, reaping the reward of her choice. Although there were moments when a simple tune whistled by a boy in the street, a phrase, a half resemblance stabbed her with pain, yet Cis was able truthfully to tell Nan that she was happy. By temperament and will she was framed to look forward, not back. Her optimistic courage was inspiring to Jeanette; she grew fond of Cis and turned to her as to a tonic, a summons to do her best also.

Nan was submerged in her house, in its master and little Matt. She paid Cis her old loving worship, raised to an incalculable degree by her reverence for Cis as for one who had given her proofs, but there was no time in any day to spare for anyone but Joe and Matt. Nan and Cis met in the baby more intimately, more frequently than in each other, outside this powerful little downy link.

To her amazement, Cis discovered herself a baby

worshiper; she had not known that she was a member of that order, in one of its highest degrees.

Her godson was to her hardly less adorable than to his mother. She hung over him, absorbing his violet-scented, milky sweetness as the odor of a flower; brooding over the miracle of his tiny features, their curious twistings, the crooked smile of his sucked-in lips; the funny thrusts of his absurdities of hands, doubled into fists and taking her in the eye, or letting her mumble them with kisses that inclosed the wrinkles of his wrists, the blue-blue veins traced below the whiteness of the backs of those belligerent little hands. When he looked into her eyes and laughed aloud, clutching her wealth of hair, Cis was elated, humbled, flattered. In baby Matt she found a new joy that revealed her to herself; she knew now what she had renounced when she had gone out of that pretty apartment, leaving Rodney there amid the ruins of his hopes and hers. Not for an instant did she regret, turn back in thought upon her right course, but she understood the void which ached in her, and often the baby's fine white tiny yoke was damp when his godmother raised her face from it, while he was gurgling with laughter because she had burrowed into his neck, tickling him.

Cis boarded with Nan. "Of course you couldn't so much as think of living anywhere else, as long as I have room for you and want you so dreadfully! Besides, there's baby!" Nan had said, and there was nothing to bring against her brief, convincing arguments.

"It isn't as though I were going to be here permanently," Cis said. "I think no one ought permanently to live with a married friend, but just till I go back to Beaconhite—or whatever I do next—I suppose it won't be too hard on you, Mrs. Nan!"

Tom Dowling was a model of fraternal devotion after Cis was installed under Nan's roof; he made opportunities to visit his sister to an incredible degree.

"Good old Tommy is a dear boy, but I wonder if he really thinks I don't see through him!" Nan cried.

"Paraffine paper is thick beside his transparency; you'd be more than blind to miss seeing through him," Joe answered.

Tom brought extraordinary things to the baby, toys which would require two more years of life for him to handle—a whipping top is not adapted to a boy two months old, nor is a tin locomotive run by sand that flows upon its wheels from a revolving sieve, hidden in its smokestack.

"Oh, Tommy, why, *why!*" Nan sighed one day when Tom produced a large cow, with a realistic moo when its head was moved, from a large package beneath his arm.

"He'll grow to it; something to cut his ambition on, same's you give him that bone thing to chew on for his teeth," explained Tom, unabashed.

"Tom's really a dear, Cis," Nan said that night after Tom had gone home. "Mother is perfectly delighted that he has stuck to you so; she used to hope he'd see Louise Müller, a neighbor's daughter,

but he never did. Now mother is worrying for fear you won't care about him. Do you think that you ever could, Cis darling? Of course all these cows, and tops and engines are not for baby; they're for you, same as the candy is."

"I don't seem to enjoy the cow any more than Matt does; must I play with it, Nan? Tom didn't offer it to me," Cis sighed.

"Not directly. I mean they're all intended to make you notice him. I'd almost die of joy, Cis, if you were my sister!" cried Nan.

"Adopt me, Nannie. We can make it as effectual, and I'm afraid it's the only way," Cis suggested. "Don't look cast down; Tom will be all right, and it's better to have him imagine he cares about me than to be growing up without an object. He'll find the right girl later, and in the mean time it keeps him safe for her."

"Growing up! He's as old as you are, or so nearly it comes to the same thing!" cried Nan. "You don't take Tom seriously, but he takes himself—and you—seriously enough."

"Boys do," said Cis. "Don't fuss, little grandmother; it's enough to be a mother and bring up Matt. He's learning to love me, too, by the way!"

As the days passed, however, Cis began to take Tom more seriously; he began to be a burden on her mind. He dogged her footsteps; wherever she went Tom turned up. He watched for chances to do her small services, carried out her least suggestions, modelled himself upon the advice which she had given him when she had first come back, be-

fore she realized that she must not let him conform himself to her ideas, before she began to look upon him as anything more than Tommy Dowling, Nan's honest and likable boy-brother.

"If only Miss Braithwaite would come back!" thought Cis. "I'd go away and he'd do something sensible with himself! All I can do now is to hold him down, and hold him off, but I'm really beginning to be afraid it's bad for him."

One bright, frosty afternoon, when the earth was white and the sky brilliantly blue, Cis went off alone to walk in the park. A homesick spell was upon her; she was homesick for Miss Braithwaite, for the shadowy library and its glowing hearth; for Mr. Lucas' office and its interests, the clever, keen men who came there talking of great matters; her sense of being part of a world moved by levers hidden in that office. And she wondered why it was that for some time she had heard no word of Anselm Lancaster. He had written her several pleasant letters, had sent her a book at Christmas that was a delight to brain and eye. He had wished her a Happy New Year with a graceful note and a lovely little Florentine print in colors, framed in dull, dark, carved wood; a Botticelli Madonna surrounded by square-chinned, deep-eyed angels in tunics, upon which their square-trimmed locks fell at shoulder length, while their long fingers clasped tall candles that revealed to the world a Babe upon His Mother's knee.

There was growing in Cicely a discontent that she could not down; she grappled with it, hating it, for

no mood had ever mastered her, nor greatly annoyed her heretofore, and this restlessness was annoying; it got between her and her daily life; her prayers; between her and herself, her true self, brave and blithe and courageous. She wanted to walk briskly in the pretty park and think out what was wrong with her, take herself to task, and scotch the head of this miserable little asp gnawing at her. But hardly had she gone half the width of the park, its longest way, than there was Tom Dowling, coming rapidly toward her, his face illumined, his right arm saluting her.

"Oh, me!" sighed Cis inwardly. "Who wants a human being omnipresent? Hello, Tom!" she said aloud. "How do you happen to be here at a time when all honest folk are at work?"

"Nothing dishonest about me, Cis," said Tom, joining her and turning to walk beside her as a matter of course. "Why, I got the afternoon, and I went to the house. Nan said you'd gone to the park. I went around the other way; thought you'd take the north gate. Anyhow, I've found you!"

The satisfaction in Tom's voice was complete.

"Yes, Tom, but—" Cis hesitated.

"You'd rather be by yourself?" cried poor Tom. "Oh, Cis, you've played fair with me! You're nice to me, but you're nothing more. I won't be able to blame you, but if you won't love me, what under the heavens shall I do? Say, Cis, love me, can't you? I'm not such a much, but I ain't so bad, honest! I don't care how far you hunt, you won't find anything I've done to be ashamed of. I ain't

fit for you lots of ways; you've got kind of fine ladified, though I don't mean you put on. You're it, that's all! But I'm not a bad chap, that's straight, and if I was I'd tell you; I wouldn't fool you for a kingdom. I'm getting on; I make thirty now, and two people could live on fifteen hundred, easy—and the sixty dollars would buy us each some clothes, and theatre tickets, or something! And I'll have more soon. My boss makes a point of boosting married men—oh, gosh! A married man! Married to *you*, Cis! Say, Cis, don't you think you could see it, if you looked hard enough? Love me, I mean?"

"Tom, dear," said Cis a little wistfully, for the honest boy's voice shook, and his eyes were as imploring as a dog's eyes. "I like you heaps, better than before I went away. I didn't know you so well then, and besides you've come out a great deal. But I couldn't love you, Tommy; not that way. I'm sorry, dear. You are a fine boy, and the girl who does marry you will be lucky. It never will be me, and it wouldn't be right to let you think it ever might be. Sorry, Tom! I wish you didn't think you wanted me. You'd be better off with someone else, and you'll find her—"

"Cut it out!" cried Tom hoarsely. "Cut out that line of talk, Cicely Adair! You're the greatest girl in the world. There's no one can hold a candle to you, so cut it out! If you won't, you won't, but cut out all that talk. I want you, and I'll keep on wanting you. If you don't want me, and don't want me so much that you know you'll never want me,

that settles it, but I want you. Oh, Cis, why can't you want me? What is wrong with me? How can you be so infernally sure you'll never think of it? Am I such a mess? Would you tell me why, Cis?"

Cis looked pityingly at Tom's flushed, stormy face, listened with tender, pitying amusement to his incoherent implorations. She tried to explain.

"It's not that there's one thing wrong with you, Tom," she said. "It's I. I'm not thinking of marrying. I've grown years older than you are, Tom, and I've grown ever so far off from the old Cis whom you first knew and liked. I suppose you knew I was going to be married? I'm glad, thankfully glad that all that is over; I wouldn't be happy now in the way I thought I'd be happy then, not with the same people, interests. But I shall never again feel as I felt then, so glad to see someone coming, so—I'm afraid it is much the way you feel to me now, Tom dear! Truly you will get over it. It leaves you changed, older, not so light-hearted, but it leaves you; it has left me. I shall never so much as think of marrying you, my nice Nan's nice brother; yet I am fond of you, and think you're fine."

"I don't want to get over it," groaned Tom. "If I can't marry you I can keep on loving you and that way you do sort of get a person."

"I think we ought to try to get over it, Tom, because we've got to play up, not go moping along," said Cis. "Let's forget you love me; in that way, at least, and let's be glad you love me, or will love me, more as you do Nan, just as I love you. It

makes the world a fine place to live in when we know splendid people who are fond of us. Beaconhite, living in Miss Braithwaite's house, rather spoiled me for other places, Tom. You've no idea what a library that is, and what wonderful things I heard talked of before the fire!"

"Yes, so I've heard you say," growled Tom. "The old lady herself was a wonder, but how about that man, that Lancaster who was such a highbrow?"

There was no missing the implication in Tom's wrathful voice. Cis felt her blood rush to her hair in a burning blush that rivalled the hair in brilliance, and which angered her, knowing the conclusion which Tom would draw from it. Characteristically, she grappled with the situation.

"If you mean to hint, Tom Dowling, that Mr. Lancaster was interested in me, any more than in a girl living under his old friend's roof, or I in him, more than in the most splendid man I ever saw—except Father Morley, but priests don't count—you're 'way, 'way off the mark! I never once thought of such a thing as his really liking me, and you've got to take my word for it!"

"All right, Cis. I'd take your word for anything, and I'm fearfully glad to take it on this," said Tom. "I've been jealous of that chap, but that settles it, and him. If you won't hold out a chance to me it's some comfort not to think someone else has a chance. I guess you're right that Beaconhite has ruined you. If only you'd never gone! You ran into the whole thing there."

Cis knew that Tom meant that there she had met

and loved Rodney, and there had been separated from her earlier friends by the higher things to which she had grown up. It came over her with sudden force that in Beaconhite she had indeed found her fate.

She looked across the park with eyes that saw Beaconhite, the dignified street on which Miss Braithwaite lived in its most dignified house; the street where St. Francis Xavier's church stood; the garden of its adjoining school; Father Morley's thin figure with its drooping shoulders; the altar within the church, its lamp, her soul's home. Beaconhite was her true home. Some day, she thought, please God, she would go back.

And then her eyes became cognizant of her present surroundings. She saw at a little distance from her, a tawdry, shabby woman sitting upon a park bench, although it was cold, and her silken clothes were thin. There was no mistaking her, even afar, for anything but one of those derelicts which sin, having floated them prosperously for a time, throws up against the barriers of civilized society to be dashed to pieces, or caught up by a pitying lifeguard, as the case may be.

As Cicely noted her, bringing her thoughts back to what was before her, the woman covertly drew something out from the sleeve of her coat, and picked at it.

A bottle! And she was pulling the cork!

Cis sprang forward and ran, not delaying for a word to Tom, flying toward the wretched being on the bench. As she reached her the woman, who

had seen her fleeting toward her, raised the bottle to her lips.

Cis sprang; leaped the last lap of her race against suicide; threw herself, as a ball player throws himself against the base, and struck the woman's elbow. The bottle fell in myriad pieces on the walk, scenting the air with the odor of peach stones. The woman crumbled up and slid to the ground. For one instant she and her rescuer were beside each other upon the walk. Then Cis regained her feet and stood looking down upon the degraded figure before her, horror, loathing, yet divine pity in her flushed face. This was the tableau which Tom, hastening after Cis, saw as he came up.

"For heaven's sake, Cis?" he questioned her without formulating his question.

"Oh, yes, Tom, for heaven's sake!" cried Cis. "I just made it. If the police come up and catch us, she'll be taken in for attempted suicide. We must get her somewhere, quick."

"Well, what if she is taken in?" Tom disgustedly asked, hating to see Cis in proximity to this woman. "She'll be looked after by the matron."

"Oh, no! She must be saved, if she can be. Arrest won't save her. Can you hear me? Answer me. Were you a Catholic?" Cis asked, bending over the collapsed figure.

"Once I was," the woman muttered.

Cis straightened herself triumphantly. "The Good Shepherd!" she cried. "Tom, help me to get her up. You poor thing, get up! We are going to take care of you. Get up."

Tom reluctantly, yet admiring Cis, lifted the castaway, and, staggering, she made out to stand.

"Let me alone; I'm sick," she moaned.

"Yes, we know. Try to come with us. I'm afraid a policeman will come along," Cis urged her.

The word acted as a stimulant. "They'd run me in, vagrant, suicide," she muttered. "What did you stop me for? I'll get it yet."

Slowly, Tom supporting the woman with his hands under her arms, disgust and anger on his face, while Cis walked behind, occasionally steadying the wavering figure by a hand upon her spine, they reached the confines of the small park. Cis hailed a cab; they bundled the woman into it, and Cis gave the driver his order.

"To the House of the Good Shepherd," she said.

Then she added herself to the strange party, and the cab started.

"The Sisters won't thank us, perhaps," muttered Tom.

"Surely they will! There's no bound to their charity, and no bound to hope, except death," cried Cis. "She is desperately ill."

"Dissipation, dope, exposure, why wouldn't she be ill?" growled Tom. "It's a great combination for you to hitch up to, Cis."

"I don't know. My guardian angel hitches up to me, and there's more difference between me and an angel, than between this woman and me. Are you comfortable? Do you hear me speaking to you?" Cis asked.

"I hear. I heard. I don't want to go to the

Sisters; I want to die, die, die! I've had enough," the woman aroused herself to say.

"Poor soul, I'm sorry!" Cis's voice was as sweet as Nan's when she comforted her baby. "I think you'll be glad that we found you. Why, you're quite young, and you were pretty!"

"Pretty! Yes, that's so. I'm twenty-eight or nine; I don't know—" the quavering voice trailed into silence.

"Do you remember your name? Will you tell it to me, so I can call you by it?" said Cis.

"Lots of names, lots of names; plenty names. Here I'm Pearl Molineaux. Out in 'Frisco I was Carmin Casanova. Giddy Gay—that was somewhere else; I forget. Home in Chicago I was Myrtle Moore; that's while I was married," the woman said, speaking slowly.

"Chicago!" "Myrtle Moore?" Cicely's heart gave a great leap, then stood still. Could it be? She was sure that it was! She was sure that it had been given her to save from suicide Rodney's wife.

She bent down over the woman who had sagged low in the seat of the taxicab.

"You are the wife of George Rodney Moore?" she asked.

"No. Divorced. Rod and I were divorced," she said.

"Oh, God help me!" Cis murmured, and Tom was frightened by the pallor of her face.

"Oh, God, I'll try! Please, help me! Help her; help me to help her!"

The cab stopped at the door of that beneficent

house wherein stainless women welcome within their consecrated walls the outcasts whose stains of soul their pure hands labor to remove; wherein the virgin servants of the Good Shepherd carry back to Him His lost black sheep.

Myrtle Moore was reluctant to enter that portal, but her strength was spent, her will too enfeebled by illness to resist anyone who decided for her and forcibly executed their decisions.

Tom helped Myrtle up the steps; the Sister Portress responded to their summons on the bell, and they were shown into a small parlor, from which Cis was conducted to another reception room, where a tall nun, in the beautiful white habit of her order, came to hear from her the story of this latest rescue and petitioner for her charity.

There was no question of Myrtle's rejection. Another nun came to take her away to the infirmary, and Cis left the convent with the promise to come regularly to inquire after Myrtle, whose condition the infirmarian at once pronounced grave. Tom took Cis's hand and slipped it into his arm; she was trembling.

"Great old adventure, splendid Cis?" he said.

"Oh, Tom, don't talk about it; I can't!" Cis almost sobbed. "You don't know how wonderful it is!"

CHAPTER XXII

ENTANGLED THREADS

WHEN Tom put the key of Nan's front door into the keyhole and swung the door open for Cis to precede him into the house, she darted forward and began swiftly to mount the stairs.

"Oh, say, Cis, hold on!" Tom remonstrated. "What am I to tell Nan?"

"Anything you like, but beg her to give me a little time to myself to straighten out my thoughts. I'm—I suppose I'm tired, Tom," Cis paused to say, then continued upstairs, not answering as Nan called from the dining room:

"Cis, oh, Cis! Come in here a minute! I've just finished the baby's new coat and pressed it. Come, see it!"

Tom joined Nan, flushed and happy over the ironing board, with baby Matt kicking and cooing in the clothes basket, liking the flavor of its edge, over which he had fallen and was chewing it.

"Say, Nan, what do you think?" asked Tom mysteriously. "Talk about melodramas and adventure stories! Life can give the best author cards and spades and beat him out on plots! Rodney Moore's wife was sitting on a park bench, committing suicide, all by herself, when along came Cis and your brother. Cis saw the bottle, ran like a Marathon

victor, jumped at her, knocked the bottle to smithereens, and then we took the lady to the Good Shepherd! She's a wreck in every way a woman can wreck herself. How's that? Rodney Moore's ex-wife!"

Nan had dropped into a chair, her iron in her lap, and was staring at Tom with a horrified face.

"Tom, it can't be!" she gasped. "That woman doesn't live here."

"Don't know as to that, but she was certainly going to die here," insisted Tom.

"What do you suppose it means? If she had taken the stuff that chap would have been free; not divorced, *free*. And Cis could have married him, if she pleased. Yet it was Cis hit the woman's arm and saved her! What about it? What does it mean?"

"It must mean that the poor wretch is going to have a chance to repent and die decently some day," said pious little Nan. "But Rodney Moore's wife! And Cis saved her! What a story! Why, Tom, it makes me shake! Oh, I must go to Cis! I'll take the baby up to her. He'll comfort her."

"No, no! Cis told me to ask you to let her alone awhile, till she pulls herself together," Tom said. "Nan, the woman looked about all in. If she dies will Cis—?"

"I don't know, I can't tell," cried Nan. "I hope not. Yet I see it would do everything for that man. It may be the way he'll come right. We never can see ahead of the day. But, Tommy dear, don't mind too much. I'm quite sure, whether it is Rod-

ney Moore again or not, that it will never be you. I'm sorry, buddy, but that is true."

"No need of your saying so," growled Tom. "Cis said it herself, so plain that it doesn't need footnotes for me to get it. All the same—" Tom stopped, turning away.

"Yes, I say so, too! All the same I'd hate it to be Rodney Moore. But maybe it is Cis's work to save his soul," said Nan, picking up her son, finding him an effectual restorative.

"Oh, his soul!" exclaimed Tom, and his tone sounded like an anathema. "I call it going pretty far to make a nice girl marry a man to save his soul!"

"We ought to be willing to die to save a soul," Nan reminded him.

"I'm perfectly willing that lots of people should die to save a soul, but I ain't willing one girl should marry to save one, not when the girl is Cis," said Tom stalking off in disgust the stronger that he had been badly shaken in nerves.

Up in her room Cis knelt before the window, staring out into the top of a spruce tree outside Nan's little house. It was a long time before she could think coherently. The horror of the suicide so nearly accomplished; the almost equal horror of the woman's degradation; the unmistakable stamp upon her of vice, upon her who was Rodney's wife, yet who was not in any true sense his wife, nor could be the wife of any honest man, filled Cicely with shuddering confusion. It was as if she had a vision of what it meant when one said: "A lost

soul." Pity for Rodney overwhelmed her, yet, unjustly or justly, Cis felt as though he were stained by the vileness of this bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh. "And they two shall be as one flesh." The words echoed within her mind, empty of connected thoughts, tense with fragments of thoughts which at once confused and tortured her poignantly.

After a time Cis began to realize fully what had befallen her. She had parted from Rod because this woman lived. She had chanced upon her at barely the right time to secure her continuing to live; she had saved her from suicide, kept her alive to shackle Rodney, according to the law which had bound them together, but had given her another chance for Eternal Life. Now she lay within the spotless physical and spiritual purity of the House of the Good Shepherd. It was Cicely Adair, who had been so sore beset with temptation to marry this woman's husband, who had been allowed to lead her inside the Good Shepherd's field where she might, if she would, become that sheep which He bore upon His shoulders into safety.

Cicely's bright head bowed on the window sill; her breath came short; her cheeks grew wet with tears such as she had never before shed, as the realization came to her that this was her superabounding reward. Because she had renounced Rodney for God's sake, He was making her as the little crook which He laid around the neck of Rodney's errant wife, compelling her to turn and return.

Cis rose up at last when Nan, unable to leave her

to herself longer, came softly knocking at her door, and, with a loving kiss, laid the baby in Cicely's arms, offering her thus the best clue that she knew to the mysteries of life, the sweetest panacea for its ills. And as she did so, Nan, with a sudden sinking of heart, was sure that Cis would marry Rodney; that his wife would die and she would marry him, because she had known what it was to worship at the shrine of this baby.

Cis had little to say to Nan of the tremendous experience of that day; what was there to say? It was far too great for comment, and of the possible import of it, its strange connection with her recent past, Cis had no desire to talk to Nan. She did go with it to Jeanette Lucas, whose understanding was perfect, but to her Cis found herself unequal to say much. She wrote to Father Morley, and received from him a long letter that formulated and expressed for Cis all that she had been trying to correlate in herself. However, it was in her daily visits to the House of the Good Shepherd that Cis received the best fruit of these experiences.

Every day Cis made time to go to see Myrtle Moore, and every day she sat for a while with the white robed nun whom they called Sister Bonaventure, properly so called her, Cis thought, for her coming was always good for her.

She was wise with a wisdom that must have been the direct reception of that gift from the Holy Ghost, for she "had entered religion," she told Cis, at twenty-two.

She had spent but one year at home after her graduation from a convent school, so that she had encountered nothing of the world's wickedness and weakness, yet she seemed to have plumbed the depths of the science of souls; her talk was illuminative and tonic to Cis.

"Will she die, Sister?" Cis asked, speaking of their patient.

"Surely; we all shall," smiled the nun. "But yes; I think Myrtle will not live long. You see, she has used up all her capital of strength, burned it like a fuel that yields cold, not heat. I think she will not last long."

"And will she die well—sorry, you know?" Cis hesitated; she found it hard to talk of Rodney's wife's state, even to Sister Bonaventure.

"My dear," said Sister Bonaventure with her smile, which Cis found at once illuminative and baffling, "as to that we can only pray and hope; pray that she may have the grace she so sorely needs; hope that when she receives the sacraments they may have the soil to work on in which they always are fruitful. The poor things who die in our infirmary rarely refuse the last offices, and we try to make them fit to receive them; after that—" Sister Bonaventure waved her hands expressing the Infinite Mercy, and the incomprehensibility of human minds. "I think they are probably sorry, and God is anxious to go half-way to meet a parting soul. Habit dulls us all; perhaps God has to come farther toward all of us than we think He does, even to the best of us."

"What a miracle to be where Myrtle Moore was, yet to die with you Sisters praying around her!" cried Cis, tears in her eyes.

"What a miracle it is to die anywhere, yet with immortality and infinity around us!" cried Sister Bonaventure. "Cicely, we are so surrounded with miracles, so accustomed to handling them, that we are obtuse! Now, my dear, this woman's former husband, who is still her husband, for they were married by a priest, and their divorce does not touch the fact—what about him? He should be sent for, if she grows as much worse within a week as our doctor and our Sister Infirmarian expects her to. She does not know where he is, and we are completely at sea as to how to look for him. Could you make a suggestion?"

"Did you know, Sister, that I was going to marry him, not knowing that he had ever been married? And that he would not deceive me, so, at the last minute—our home was preparing—he told me that he was divorced?" cried Cis.

"Was that the way of it?" asked Sister Bonaventure serenely. "No, I did not know anything whatever, but I surmised that there was something to know, that your interest in the patient was not fully explained by your rescue of her. Have you his address, my dear?"

"He can always be reached through his firm, the main house, in Chicago," replied Cis. "I have that address; yes, Sister. Shall I give it to you?"

She wondered at the matter-of-course way in which the nun received her brief statement that

she had almost, though innocently, married a man already married. She had not dealt enough with the Religious of her faith to know that they rarely seem to be surprised by human vagaries, and still more rarely betray a shock.

"No, on the whole, I think it were better that you should write," said Sister Bonaventure. "Mr. Moore might not come if we wrote him. He has divorced the woman, and it is not likely that he feels tolerant of her sins against him. If you write to him, telling him how you saved her from death by her own hand, and that he must come at once to see her, bid her farewell, and forgive her, that she may die in peace, hoping for a higher forgiveness, I think that he may come on. Especially that you have a claim upon him for the wrong that he so nearly did you."

"Oh, Sister, you don't, you can't ask me to write to him!" cried Cis. "How can I write him? And what may he not think? That I want to see him, even that I may—"

"You will write to him as a disembodied spirit would write; you can easily show him your motive. You really cannot refuse to write. The poor woman wants to see him, to receive his pardon; she cannot die in peace without it. I must tell you that we did write to him, to Beaconhite. We know that the letter was forwarded, for otherwise it was to have been returned in three days. He has not replied in any way. You must write, Cicely; you must still further help Myrtle to die. As to the man's misinterpreting you, that will not outlast his coming, and

cannot harm you. If I did not know that you were wholly free from personal desire in the matter, I would not let you write. I have watched you, talking with you, and I understand you. As it is, I ask you to write—at once."

"I will!" cried Cis, swayed to Sister Bonaventure's will by something in her eyes.

"Oh, Sister Bonaventure, if you know me—and you do!—could I be one of you here? Or a nun anywhere? Am I fit to be? It is so lofty, so peaceful, so blessed!"

"You are entirely fit, my child, but not in the least fitted," said the nun, with the smile that drew hearts to her. "It is not that the best come here, but the called come. The life is all that you say it is, but peace is denied to no one who follows after it. You do not belong with us, dear Cicely; not in any Community, but in a home whence you will overflow to bring happiness and help into other lives."

"As though you nuns didn't!" sighed Cis, rising to go.

"Ah, yes, I know. Little mirrors reflect wherever they are hung! Good-bye, my dear. Write that letter to-night and dispatch it," said Sister Bonaventure.

Cis wrote when she got back to her room at Nan's. She did not let herself pause for an instant to remember that she was writing to Rodney—again!

"Dear Rodney;" she wrote. "Myrtle Moore, your wife, is here, in this city. I came upon her in

the park just as she was putting to her lips the deadly poison which was to kill her. I knocked the bottle from her hand. I took her to the House of the Good Shepherd. She is seriously ill there; dying. She cannot die without begging your forgiveness. Come on at once and give it to her. We shall all need mercy one day, as we have all done wrong. Come at once. Remember that Myrtle is still your wife. Think of her as she was when you first knew her; she is now a wreck, suffering, wretched, dying. Do not lose a day. You must see in this the Hand of God: that she had wandered here; that I came back here; that it was I who saved her from suicide to die with the sacraments, hope and sorrow in her miserable heart. If there is anything that I could add to urge you to come, I would add it, but what more is there? A woman whom you once loved, an outcast, broken-down, dying, begging your forgiveness! It is miserably sad, but still more pitiable; you are kind, Rodney; you will not say no. And God let me save her from a dreadful end, *me*, Cicely Adair."

Cis read her letter several times, then she took it to Jeanette Lucas to read.

"I can't tell whether it is right or wrong," Cis said imploringly.

"I don't think you could better it, dear. What can you do except lay before him the facts? He cannot refuse such a request as this, and from you! How strange it all is! Cis, when he comes—what?" Jeanette waited for Cis's answer.

It came at last.

"Yes, what?" Cis echoed. "I don't want to see him. Will you hide me, Jeanette?"

"But you know when this poor Myrtle is dead—" Jeanette stopped.

"No, no, no!" cried Cis. "What a curiously tangled web! I wonder why?"

"It is not tangled," Jeanette reminded her. "It looks so to us; I'm sure the tangle is part of the pattern."

Three days must pass before Rodney could reply to Cicely's letter, and that would be making the best time possible for a letter to travel in each direction. It would be longer, if he were coming; time must be allowed, in either case, for Cicely's letter to be forwarded to him. They were hard days to live through; dread, expectation, perhaps fear is not too strong a word, were in the air that Cis breathed; she spent the hours in feverish nervousness. And Myrtle was rapidly growing worse.

On the fourth day Rodney came. It was evening, and Cis was sitting with Nan under the light of her reading lamp, in her sitting room, when they heard Joe open the front door and tell someone to "walk right in."

Before they had time to be startled by the realization that the step was not Tom's, whom they had expected to see, Rodney Moore stood in the doorway.

Nan had seen him but once; however, she instantly recognized him and sprang up with an inarticulate sound that was almost a shocked cry. Cis

sat still, staring up at him, her work fallen into her lap.

Rodney had changed; he looked older, worn, hard. Cis instantly felt great pity for him, but it was mingled with amazement that she had so lately found him all that was attractive in man. Something stood between them that was not the dying Myrtle. Cis had learned, had absorbed other standards of excellence than Rodney's since she had parted from him; they asserted themselves without her volition, her consciousness of their presence.

"Cis!" said Rodney hoarsely, and Cis became aware that she had not spoken.

"Yes, Rodney. I am thankful that you have come," Cis said.

She arose, went forward and gave Rodney an icy hand.

"I will telephone the Sisters and ask when you are to go to see Myrtle. She has sunk fast for two days; I found her quite low when I went there this afternoon, but they think that she is fighting to hold herself alive till you get here. Perhaps you must go there to-night." Cis turned toward the telephone in the corner.

"For heaven's sake, Cis, is this all that you have to say to me after—" Rodney's angry grief stopped his utterance.

"That I am thankful that you have come? That I will help you at once to accomplish what you came for? What else is there to say, Rodney?" Cis

asked quietly, and took down the telephone receiver.

"Have I no claim? Am I no more than an undertaker, called in to lay out that miserable woman?" Rodney almost shouted.

Cis turned toward him and raised her hand.

"I am waiting for my connection; please be quiet," she said. "You have a claim upon my pity and help; I am giving you both."

Rodney stared at her as she turned back to the instrument and talked for a short time to someone on the other end of the wire. Cis hung up, and came back to the middle of the room, leaning her hand on the table as if she were tired.

"You are to go to the Good Shepherd to-night," she said. "The Sister Infirmarian says that you have not come too soon. If Nan will give you supper we will start immediately after you have eaten. I will take you there, unless you prefer to go alone."

"I can't go alone; I'm afraid," Rodney groaned.

Gentle Nan went over to him as she heard his boyish cry. She began to hope that Cicely would comfort him, as she alone could do, and lead him back to God, which seemed to her preëminently Cicely's grace.

"I don't want any supper, but have you coffee?" Rodney asked, and Nan hurried away to make it, followed by Cis, who had no mind to linger with Rodney alone.

Joe called a taxi; the coffee was quickly made on the gas range, and drunk. Cis found herself whirl-

ing as in a dream through the streets, beside Rodney.

He groped for her hand, but Cis withheld it.

"There is no you nor I, Rodney," she said sternly. "Myrtle is dying. Pray that you may be able to help her out of the world which she has tragically spoiled for herself, for you, and for who can say how many others? Pray hard that you and she, both, may be allowed to atone."

"Do you think that I am partly responsible for her wickedness?" Rodney demanded fiercely.

"I don't know, oh, I don't know; I hope not," said Cis wearily. "I'm beginning to see that we are almost always sharer in a wrong that is within our own radius. We are so slow to see, so indifferent to save."

The taxi stopped at the door of the House of the Good Shepherd, which opened at once to admit Cis and Rodney.

"Yes, very low," the Sister answered Cicely's question. "They say she will die to-night. She has made her confession, and received the last rites; she is conscious and lies watching the door for her husband to come."

Rodney felt the word like a cord around him. None of these Catholics, whom he had tried to leave behind him, but who were again interwoven into his life, heeded the decree of divorce which annulled for him his title of husband. How unbending, everlasting, certain, were the ways of Rome even in all her least, most distant avenues!

"Oh, Rod!" Myrtle breathed his name as he en-

tered. "Now I'll die. Maybe it's true God will forgive me, if you can. You're harder than God. I'm sorry, honest. Forgive me, Roddie?"

Rodney looked down on her; at the fluttering hand feebly extended toward him; at the face which he had known young and pretty, now wasted, consumed by Myrtle's life, the life now panting toward its final breath.

A great pity came upon him. There, on the other side of the bed, knelt Cis, the stainless girl whom he loved, her face white and tear-wet, sweet and grave with pity, and pain, and fear.

Who was he to condemn, to refuse mercy? Did he not need it, too? Had his life been so far beyond reproach? Cis, kneeling there, thought that he was worse than Myrtle, for she had sinned, but was absolved. She had broken God's laws, but he had turned his back on God coldly, deliberately. And he had not confessed himself a sinner. He was not a hard-hearted man, and the awfulness of what lay there before him, what awaited Myrtle, now hoping for Rodney's pardon, so soon to stand before God for His sentence, melted him, broke down his anger against his wife.

Rodney knelt beside the bed, and took the fluttering hand, folding its feeble fingers within his own.

"It's all right, Myrtie; don't worry," he said. "I'll forgive everything, and I'm sorry if I ever drove you an inch on your road. It's all right, poor girl. Go to sleep and take your rest."

"Well, God bless you, Rod!" sighed Myrtle.

"I'm going to sleep; pray I'll rest." Beside that bed for three hours Cis, Myrtle's divorced husband, who at last realized that there was no divorce but the one Myrtle, slipping away, was giving him, and a Sister recited the prayers for a parting soul. At the first hour of the morning the soul quietly, with a few deep drawn breaths, parted.

Rodney went back to Nan's in the taxi with Cis. They did not speak during the drive. But as Rodney opened the door for Cis with her pass key, he put out his hand and Cis laid hers in it without a word.

"I'm going to the hotel. To-morrow I'll attend to things, then—May I see you, Cis?" Rodney asked.

"Yes. I'll see you, Rodney—to say good-bye," Cis answered.

"I've no right to complain of that," Rodney said humbly. "You're a good girl, Cis. Whatever had been, you would have been too good for me. I'm thankful to you, Cis, for to-night."

"I'm thankful to God. Good night, Rodney," said Cis.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE NEXT STEP

DURING the remnant of that night left for sleep Cis slept deeply, too tired in mind and body to be wakeful.

Her hours at the telephone exchange were elastic; she had undertaken the organization work only on a provisory basis, unwillingly, with the understanding that it might continue in her hands but a short time. She called up her own department in the morning and said that she would not go down until after lunch. She knew that Rodney would come to see her, probably in the forenoon. She knew that she must not refuse to see him. He had done right because she had asked it of him; the least that she could do was to repay that debt by bidding him good-bye, this time, she was sure, for all the rest of her life. She dreaded the interview, yet dreaded it less than she had expected to. Her experience with Rodney had been marked by extremes of emotion, even up to the previous night when, by a strange combination of circumstances, she and he had watched his wife die while they responded to the prayers for mercy upon her. Now Cis stood upon the plane of quiet. There remained but to drop the curtain upon this drama in her life, with a Godspeed for poor Rodney.

Little Nan went about with an awe-struck, frightened face as the morning hours passed and Cis awaited Rodney. Nothing dramatic had ever come within the sweet little woman's orbit; she did not know how to bear herself as a sort of fringe upon Cicely's tragic cloak.

"I'll stay in the room, or keep away, just as you say, Cis—I mean when he comes," Nan said. "I don't know what is done in these cases."

Cis laughed; being Cis she would always laugh at anything funny.

"I don't believe they set down rules for 'these cases' in books of etiquette, Nan! But I wouldn't like to give Rodney an audience; you and I are another matter," she said.

"Thank goodness!" cried Nan fervently. "I'd be so scared I'd probably crawl under the sofa!"

"Which would do no one else any good, and muss up your hair dreadfully," Cis suggested.

When the bell rang it was nearly noon. Nan fled to open the door, and then to escape. Cis had been holding the sleepy baby, and when Rodney entered she had risen to meet him, little Matt held in her arm, which could not quite support his white kid-shod feet. His rosy face was pressed against Cis's breast; his half-open eyes regarded the stranger with a languid interest that suggested a verdict on him, rendered after a nap had been completed.

The doorway framed this sweet picture of poignant suggestions; Rodney halted and stood gazing at it motionless, silent, his face working with pain.

He came forward and put out his hand. Cicely laid hers in it, then withdrew it and turned to resume her chair, wondering if Nan would fetch away the baby.

"Take that more comfortable seat, Rodney," she said. "This is my godson; we are on the best of terms."

"I am going away on the train that leaves here for Chicago at eight minutes to two," Rodney said, ignoring all extrinsic subjects. "Myrtle's people replied to a telegram from me that she might be buried in their family lot; they live about fifteen miles outside Chicago. The Sisters sent them word that Myrtle was in their hands, dying; they did not reply. Neither did I reply to a letter from the Sisters. You made me come on. Queer, isn't it, that I, who am no relation to her, and you who never knew her, are the only ones to see Myrtle out off the earth, and decently put into it?" Rodney spoke with a visible effort.

"You are related to her; you two were made one flesh," said Cis.

"Well, Cis, I'm going to own up! The Church is right. I've been feeling that. Myrtle separated herself from me by a chasm that no honorable man would cross; that's all so. But the state did not divorce me from her; it couldn't. If marriage asserts itself, in spite of that impassable chasm of disgrace and infamy, as it surely does, then it's beyond the reach of the state. You were right; I was wrong. If we had been married last night, kneeling beside Myrtle, neither of us could have borne

it. Curious, isn't it? But you were right. Is it any satisfaction to you to have me acknowledge it? I hope it is. I was furiously, bitterly angry with you, Cis, but you were right. I'm able to see now that it cost you high to choose as you did."

"It hurt, Rodney," said Cis simply. "I don't suppose I should say now that it cost me high; I realize that I made a tremendous purchase at a low rate. I've been thinking how strange it is: You are taking Myrtle's body to Chicago, then to her own people!"

"On that eight minutes to two," Rodney corroborated her.

"Yes. How strange it is that you have come to say good-bye to me, and are going away with Myrtle, after all," Cis completed her thought.

"But, Cis, it is not reunited to her," Rodney protested. "It is recognition that the divorce did not set me free to marry you, but there was far more than any decree separating me from Myrtle. And therefore there is no reason for conventionality, no reason for assuming that my wife has just died, and that I am on my way to bury her. I am not; I am seeing her looked after and I grant you I could not marry again on my divorce, yet there's no wife of mine newly dead, either. Cis, now I am free. Now the Church puts no barrier between us. You can be as Catholic as you will, and yet marry me. There's nothing to wait for; we've spent a long probation. When, Cis?"

"Never, Rodney," said Cis quietly. "I hoped you understood that."

"I understood that you wanted me to understand it when you told me you'd see me to say good-bye. You couldn't have expected me to go off on a hint! Why won't you marry me, Cis? You have changed enormously, but I know you're not fickle, not easily moved, either way. You still love me?" Rodney pleaded.

"No, Rodney, I don't," Cis said. "It amazes me to find that you stir memories of feeling, but no feeling. Don't you think, perhaps, there is a reaction from intense pain that produces in the mind something like the immunity that a violent sickness produces in the physical system? I was dashed to pieces, and the reassembled person has lost the vibration to your personality."

"Merciful powers! Cis!" cried Rodney, honestly disgusted. "You talking philosophy, or psychology, or some other rotten, cold-blooded analysis! You, glowing, red-haired, my Holly? That high-browed crowd you've gone in with at Beaconhite have cold packed you!"

Cis smiled faintly. "I'm no colder than I ever was—"

"Except to me!" Rodney interrupted her. "Don't tell me that I don't remember—"

"Except to you," Cis interrupted in her turn, her color heightened. "I have grown up, and we are no longer possible chums. It happens often enough that people grow apart, even when they're married. When it has happened to two people who are free, there can be, there should be, no talk of marriage

between them. We must say good-bye, Rodney, as you came to say it."

"As you told me to come to say it; I didn't mean to say it," Rodney pulled on a chain from inside his breast, and held up to Cis her ruby holly ring. "I wear it, but take it back, Cis!" he begged.

"Oh, the poor, lovely ring!" Cis cried. "I will never take it back. Oh, Rodney, we had not planned for the true Christmas when I wore that! Give the ruby to be set in a chalice, or sell it, and send the money to take care of some helpless baby who may never know that Our Lord was a baby! Let it make a trifling reparation for us both."

Rodney stared, but this suggestion seemed to convince him that between him and Cis stretched unbridgeable distances.

"Well, you have got it bad!" he said slowly, not so much irreverently as in a puzzled way, expressing himself in the vernacular of his custom.

"Don't you think it's natural to want to pay back?" Cis suggested. "If the Church were not true, she could not be so beautiful, and you do 'have it bad,' as you say, when you love anything that is wholly true and profoundly beautiful. Rodney, truly you don't begin to know! I wish you would —at least begin to know! Did you ever read about those poor animals which have been shut down in mines, how they act when they come up into the sunshine, into green fields again? Quite mad with the warmth, and brightness, and pasturage? I'm like that. I went along, didn't know what I was missing, but now I know what I have! Will you

promise me, Rodney, solemnly promise me, now, to-day when we part, that you will do your best to learn what your birthright is which you threw away?"

Rodney Moore looked long and mutely at Cis, frowning, biting his lip; she had silenced his pleas for his personal desires. She waited for his answer.

At last it came.

"Yes," Rodney said. "I will look into it thoroughly. It must be a big thing to do what it did last night. And to you—though that's another story. It hit me when you would not marry me, stuck to the Church, though you didn't seem to care much about her. I know a chap who is a Dominican in Chicago; he and I were confirmed together. I'll hunt him up. It's a promise."

"Then God bless you, Rodney, and I'll pray for you hard. It's good-bye, now, isn't it? I heard the Angelus from our church faintly ever so long ago," said Cis, rising.

Rodney pulled out his watch.

"I'll say it was long ago!" he cried. "I'll have to eat on the train. But it won't take me long to connect with my bag at the hotel. Everything else is done. Cis, good-bye. Oh, Cis, good-bye! Not for always? Let me come again!"

"Better not, Rodney. I'm not going to stay here, though; not long. I think this time it is for always, yet we may meet again; there should be many days before we are old. Truly God bless you, Rodney," said Cis, holding out her hand.

Their hands met over the sleeping baby; he seemed like a figure of their complete separation, filling the place of the child who would never be.

"Kiss me, Holly," Rodney whispered.

"Our hands hold all that we give," Cicely answered, and once more he bowed to her will.

"I shall remember you looking like a madonna. Good-bye, good-bye, ah, Cis, good-bye!" Rodney lifted to his cheek the hand he held, then laid it upon the child's breast, beside its mate.

Cis stood motionless after the front door closed, till Nan came creeping into the room and little Matt stirred with a complaining cry.

Rodney had gone, gone with Myrtle, dead, to bury her; deeper still to bury his hope and love of Cicely. Nothing was left of Rodney Moore except his promise to her. But that promise filled Cis with exaltation.

The next morning Cis made it on her way to her office to go to see Jeanette Lucas, though it was a détour that took her in the opposite direction for several blocks.

"Cis, I wanted to see you; did you sense it?" Jeanette cried as she came in. "I've something wonderful, marvellous to tell you. You remember Paul Ralph Randolph?"

"Why, of course I do," said Cis. "Didn't he tour New England with Mr. Lancaster last summer, keeping with Miss Braithwaite's car? I rode with him lots of times, and had fine talks. He's the con-

vert minister who has been so fine about it; I mean sacrifices and all that."

"Surely! Cis, he's a confessor of the faith! He's almost a martyr for it! He's perfectly glorious!" cried Jeanette.

"You've heard all that; everybody has, of course. You don't know him, do you?" Cis asked.

"Oh, Cicely Adair! He told me that he had talked to you of me!" Jeanette looked aggrieved. "I met him in England; he crossed with us coming home. He was received in England, because it was easier. His father and mother behaved violently about his coming over to the Church, when he announced that he intended to come, so he went across, and he was received by the Benedictines over there. Don't you remember? I must have spoken of it, and he himself told you that he knew me! What a girl! Did you remember everything he told you of Mr. Lancaster? Paul says—"

"Hallo! *Who* says?" cried Cis.

"Yes, that's my news!" Jeanette triumphed over her. "*Paul* says, *Paul*, whom I'm going to marry! Paul Ralph Randolph, the confessor, and almost martyr!"

"Martyr nothing!" Cis relapsed under the shock into her earlier habits of speech.

"He's no martyr if he marries you, Jeanette Lucas! You're too lovely to marry any mere man. I always did think you were superfinely fine! But this is great news, my dearest, and nobody is gladder than red-haired Cis!"

"Nobody is nicer than red-haired Cis!" retorted

Jeanette. "I was afraid you'd be a little shocked, because you knew I was engaged before. But, Cis, though it hurt me dreadfully when you let me discover Herbert Dale's character, and I was wretched after it, it was the sickness of disenchantment; the shock cured me of all love for him. I half hoped I might be a nun; I spoke of it to you once, but it isn't my place. When Paul asked me to marry him —three days ago; he wrote me—I knew how I loved him; I hadn't realized it before. Oh, my dear, I'm so happy and so humbled!"

"I don't mind how happy you are, but not humbled," Cis protested, kissing her over and over again.

"And I want you happy, splendid Cicely," Jeanette murmured.

"Oh, as to that, I'm sure to be; it's the temperament of my hair," said Cis, turning away slightly. "But I'd like to be useful, fill a place, find the right place to fill. Sister Bonaventure says no habit for poor Cicely! I wonder what I'm meant for; nothing in particular, probably. Reliable secretary, run a typewriter accurately, get under the skins of youngsters when they need entertaining! Well, it's at least a harmless life."

There was a note in Cicely's voice new to it. Jeanette instantly pounced upon her. "Lonely, Cis? Not perfectly happy? These past days made things harder? They've been cruelly hard in themselves, I'm sure of that!"

Cis swung around to face her.

"It's not that I still want Rod; don't think that!"

she cried. "I knew I didn't, but I know it better now. These days were hard, but they were a comfort, too. I'm not lonely, not exactly; perhaps, a little. I don't know what I want. I miss Miss Braithwaite, my life with her. Perfectly happy? I'm twenty-three; the 'first fine careless rapture' is over then, I suppose. I want a place to fill; I want a work to do that will take every bit of me to do it."

Cis quoting Browning? Cis half pensive, unsatisfied? Jeanette wondered.

"Poor Cicely! I suspect if we put a dynamo to grinding coffee it would find the grains small and the dust they made too trivial!" Jeanette said. "But you take my engagement coolly! Aren't you amazed?"

"I'm wholly amazed and surprised, and I take it less coolly than you think," declared Cis. "It has rather bowled me over. I suppose I dread to have you married. Where shall you live, Jeanette, dear?"

"In Beaconhite. Paul is going into literary work there; he says I shall help him. And he is going to teach Greek and Latin in that big boys' school on the outskirts of the city—Graycliff Hall—and he'll probably lecture. It will be Beaconhite," Jeanette answered.

Cis's face had brightened as she listened.

"I know I'm going back there, somehow," she declared. "That's good news that you'll be within reach. I'm hungry for Beaconhite."

"Uncle Wilmer is ready for you at any moment,

whoever he has as his secretary," Jeanette assured her. "He told me that he would pension his secretary, if he must, and would have you back any day you'd come. He will be received into the Church at Pentecost, Cis; Father Morley will receive him, as he did father, and father will make a point of being here in time for the ceremony."

"Was there a secret about your father's going away; ought I ask?" hinted Cis.

"He was seriously ill. We told no one, lest mother hear of it; things have such a way of leaking, unexplainably! He was supposed to be travelling on matters connected with important affairs of business. He has been in a sanitarium. He is cured, thank God! Even now don't speak of this, Cis. Miss Gallatin knows, hardly anyone else. Hannah Gallatin is a great woman!" Jeanette ended with tears of gratitude and relief in her eyes.

"I never see her, lately; I wish I might," said Cis. "I believe she could set me up again with my old sensible way of taking things!"

"She's not here now. I'll tell her you need her for a—what do they call it?—a pick-me-up?" Jeanette laughed.

That evening Tom came into Nan's house as was his custom. Though Cis had bade him cease to hope for her love, and Nan had confirmed the hopelessness, yet as long as Cis was free, it was hard for Tom to give her up, and wholly impossible to stay away from her.

"Well," the boy began as he came in, "I saw something pretty decent to-night. A man came in

on the 7:56 train; I was at the station. He was great, the kind everybody turns to look at; tall, well-dressed, about forty, maybe, and—I don't know! Great; that's about the word. You wanted to speak to him, and shake hands with him. He talked something like an Englishman, not quite—"

"What did he look like?" cried Cis.

"Why, I've been telling you, haven't I?" Tom spoke in an aggrieved tone. "I don't know the color of his eyes, or anything of that sort. Handsome, I'd say, but more sort of splendid. He had another man with him, nice chap, too. Well, sir, there was a raggedy old woman hanging around, trying to find out something about trains, or farming, for all I know; nobody could make her out. She had a bag as big as a Noë's ark, and a regular eruption of bundles! A fresh boy thought it was funny to hustle her, hit up against her, and she dropped the bundles, bag, whole shooting match, all over everything! The bag bulged queer clothes —it burst open—and the bundles opened up, or two did, and out of one there sort of flowed a lot of carrots, and out of the other a white kitten got away! Don't ask me how she had it done up, for I'll never tell you! Everybody howled laughing, but what do you think that man did?"

"Helped her!" cried Cis, and she looked triumphant and excited.

"Rather! Caught the kitten and stroked it quiet; the little thing took to him as if he'd been the mother cat! Gathered up carrots with the other hand, and, in the mean time, talked to the old dame

in her own tongue—Italian—and put her wise to whatever she was trying to find out! I got in on bundling the clothes back into the bag, and the carrots into the bundle, and the kitten into a basket, which my knight of distressed dames bought at the fruit stand; he tied it down so strong that the kitten is sure to arrive wherever it's going! And I'm betting that most of the people around there felt good and ashamed of themselves! It isn't much to tell, but somehow it was a lot to see. There wasn't a person in that waiting room that didn't think that man was the greatest ever; you could feel the way the thing grabbed 'em. I tell you the truth! Of course I was sorry for the old person, and sorry I'd laughed at her, and I did want to make good by helping her out, but I wanted more to be working with that man so that he'd speak to me! He did speak, too! And I leave it to you if a fellow like me often feels that way to a man, a perfect stranger, just happening to come off the train in the station?"

"Magnetism," murmured Joe.

"There's only one man in all the world like that!" cried Cis.

Tom turned on her sharply.

"Know him?" he demanded.

"Of course I can't be sure, but it is exactly like Mr. Anselm Lancaster, and it is like no one else in all the world!" Cis said, her eyes bright, her face flushed, her breath a little quickened.

"He is the one whom everybody looks at; when he comes into a room you feel him as much as you see him. He can make anything trust him, kittens,

carrots, old women, anything! He speaks Italian as well as English, and he speaks English like an Oxford Englishman. He would do precisely what you describe, be a knight errant as soon for a poor old immigrant as for a princess! It sounds like no one but Mr. Anselm Lancaster!"

CHAPTER XXIV

THE BEACON

PRECISELY because she wanted exceedingly to stay away from the girls and neglect the arrangement of their new rooms in the telephone building, Cis arose betimes the next morning and went out early. She could not rid herself of the conviction that the man whose chivalry had so impressed Tom the previous night was Anselm Lancaster, and she wanted to stay in the house, hoping that, if it were he, he would come to look her up. It had been long, and seemed longer to Cis, since she had heard from Miss Braithwaite. Mr. Lancaster had shown no remembrance of her existence for months; it was now close upon May day, and spring in the air increased Cis's restless dissatisfaction, filling her with a homesickness which was farther reaching and deeper than homesickness for a definite place.

She told herself that it was absurd to identify Tom's hero on so slender a ground, and quite unpardonable to mope around the house expecting Mr. Lancaster to call on her. "You never were silly when it was the time to be silly; don't begin it now, Cis Adair," she sternly told herself.

So she went down to look after her girls' organization earlier than usual, in order to rebuke her

own tendency to folly, but, like most of us, she compromised with her weakness.

"I'm not coming back to lunch, Nancy," she casually told Nan. "I've looked up that bunch of little ragamuffin newsies I used to chum with before I went away. I could not find them all, but I found two or three, and they'll find the rest—one, Tony, whom I liked a great deal, is dead, poor little chap; was run over by a motor truck, they tell me. I've been thinking I missed my chance to do more than amuse them and give them a little pleasure when I was here; I'm going to see if I can make amends. I told them I'd give them the price of their papers if they'd spend the afternoon with me, take a holiday. They didn't seem to object! I'm going to take them out to the picnic glen on a hike, and give them a good time—I hope! I went out there yesterday and hid tin boxes, filled with candy, around in the rocks, and under the shrubbery, enough for each to have one; they'll have to divide fairly if anybody finds more than one. And when they've worked down some of their spirits I'm going to tell them a story, and lead up to my point—missionary point, you know! Good plan?"

"It's a dear plan, Cis!" cried Nan. "What a Cis you are! I'd like to be good your way!"

"Fiddlesticks! My way is to try to make up the least bit for not being half-way good, never once caring to give the little chaps a push in the right direction. You don't have to pay up for lost chances, Nan," cried Cis impatiently. "I could have done almost anything with those boys then. Well, that's

milk that is not only spilled, but soaked down into the ground; no use crying over it. If you need me, Nan, if the baby begins to talk, or has the croup, or anything like that, you'll find me at the picnic glen."

Cis laughed, a little shame-facedly as she made it clear to Nan where not only she, but anyone else who happened to want her might find her.

At half past one Cis, with a fringe on her garment's edge, of small boys, and a few larger ones, went briskly swinging out toward the pretty country which surrounded the little city. They were bound on a four mile walk; they would end it, at the pace they were taking it, in something over an hour and a quarter. Cis ordered her troop to sing, herself leading the dubious chorus, sung in as many variations of key and tune as was possible to the number singing. The words held most of the time in place; even little flat-faced Jimmy Devlin, who sang on one note, situated in the depth of his diapraghm, kept valiantly to the time, so the tortured music held the feet to their task.

The glen was really pretty. It was damp and fragrant with the spring moisture and odors; with the delicious earth newly released from frost, the little shoots, the new growths of bark; somewhere out of sight were violets, and on the rocks saxifrage, clustering tiny white stars on an erect stem.

The boys' delight was satisfying even to Cis, who passionately longed to put four hours and better of unadulterated joy into these meagre little lives. They went on a violent hunt for her hidden boxes

of candy, unearthed them, every one, and willingly gave each boy who had been slower than the rest the share which he had failed to discover. They played games, yelling like mad, till, at last, they were ready to drop down on the platform put up for dancing, upon which Cis insisted as a seat because the high temperature of this summerlike April day had not had time to dry the wet ground. They subsided to munch candy and let her have her way with them.

Cis had carefully planned her story, and she told it well, the story of an imaginary little Roman boy, who might have lived, who dearly loved St. Sebastian. She told them how this brave young soldier and his little friend had died, for she made her fictitious little citizen of the City of the Catacombs share the fate of the older youth, whose story was true.

Then leaning toward the lads whose eyes were fixed upon her own, clasping her hands, her eager face flushed and earnest, her glorious red hair shining under a ray of sunshine until it seemed to illumine the shady glen, Cis begged her little adorers to hold fast to that for which Sebastian's arrows had been faced, for which those little lads of old—and many since—had truly lived and gladly died.

Thus it was that Anselm Lancaster, coming down the glen from behind her, found Cis, and paused to wonder, with reverence added to the admiration he had already learned to feel for her.

One of the boys discovered him, and started up from his prone position, with a threatening gesture.

"Who's de guy? Here, this is a private show; no buttin' in!" he cried.

Anselm Lancaster laughed, and came forward as Cis leaped up and faced him, knowing at the first syllable of her indignant little guest's protest, whom she should see.

"It is a mean trick to butt in, I'm afraid," Mr. Lancaster said. "Miss Adair, will you tolerate a larger boy here?"

He stood smiling, tall and handsome, as different from ordinary men as Tom had described him; as far beyond them, Cis thought, seeing him anew after so long a time.

"Mr. Lancaster!" she cried, as if she had not been expecting him all the afternoon; wondering in the back of her brain why he did not come; if it had not been he, after all, whom Tom had seen in the station. "Where did you come from? And how glad I am that you did come!"

"Then you don't resent what your small friend here calls my butting in?" Mr. Lancaster suggested, looking no less happy than the smallest boy there.

"I went to see you, but your friend Mrs.?—Nan?—told me that you were away, and how to find you. She seemed to think I might come to the glen. You look well? Yes, I think you look well, but I'm not sure of it; you are not just as you were in Beaconhite, are you?"

"No, I'm not," said Cis. "But I'm perfectly well. What of Miss Braithwaite?"

"She is at home again. She was going to write you, but when I suggested seeing you instead, she

jumped at the idea. She said it was because she detests letter writing, but I think she wanted closer communication with you, to get my report of you. I came on with Paul, Paul Randolph. He is going to marry Miss Lucas—but she said that she had told you," Mr. Lancaster checked himself.

"She did. I hoped—I mean I thought perhaps —Well, he is lucky, that's certain. I'd be glad to have him marry Jeanette if I were his friend," Cis stammered, confused.

Anselm Lancaster elevated his eyebrows with a quizzical look. He quite well knew what Cis would have said if she had gone on with the beginning of her sentence. But all that he said was:

"I suspect it is one of your secret employments to provide for your friends' happiness! And aren't you glad that these two are engaged, being a friend of Miss Lucas? Indeed you well may be; Paul Randolph is a fine fellow!"

"Oh, I know he is! I admired him last summer, but Jeanette is fit for the best, and I'm glad, surely! She's perfectly happy. Mr. Lancaster, I've got to see to the boys! Do you mind? I'd far rather not, but see that pair over there? That tussle is getting too earnest." Cis pointed to wrestling that was rapidly degenerating into a fight.

"I've done a meddlesome thing. I want to tell the lads about it before I tell you, because then you can't betray how angry you are with me! But first may I show that pair—the others will not stand off long!—a trick or two of Japanese wrestling? Don't be afraid; I'll show them how to use it properly.

They won't come to harm, and boys have to scrap; kittens and puppies do, too, you know!" Anselm Lancaster began to take off his coat as he spoke, not waiting for Cicely's assent to his proposal.

She looked at him wondering. Was this the man whom she had feared, even when she felt most at home with him and admired him? His nearly forty years had been thrown off as he was throwing off his coat; he was like one of the older boys among her guests, except that his body showed the fine lines of breeding and training as he faced the lads, the wind blowing his silken shirt and rumpling his brown hair.

"Come on, boys!" he said tightening his belt and settling the loose collar of his shirt. "I know a thing or two about the way the Japs wrestle. Stand up to me, you biggest boy over there, and I'll give you some points which you'll find good to know, if ever you're in a tight place. I'll teach the whole crowd, but you come on first. And in case the lady in whose charge we're all here, she-that-must-be-obeyed, is afraid we'll be too late getting home, I'll tell you that we aren't going to walk it. I ordered a truck to come after us at six; it will hold us all, and get us back to town in fifteen minutes; less! How does it strike you?"

It struck them into silence for the space of a breath, and then into a babel of noisy approval.

"Oh, Mr. Lancaster, how kind you are! And what a lark!" cried Cis, flushed with delight. "Boys, if you're yelling, yell right! Three times three for Mr. Lancaster! Come on; I'll lead!"

Cis bent over and waved her arms in the approved manner; she had led her school yells in days past. The nine cheers were given deafeningly, ending with: "Rah, rah, rah; Lancaster!" which the boys approved, though they missed its meaning.

Then Mr. Lancaster initiated the boys into the beginnings of Jiu-jitsu till the big truck came into the glen, and they all piled in warm, hungry, blissfully happy.

Mr. Lancaster stood on the running board and looked the boys over.

"Going to stick to Mass every Sunday, and stand by like good fellows, every one of you? Come now, that's to be a promise! Don't make it unless you mean to keep it, but make it and keep it; see the idea?" he said.

He put out his hand to each boy in turn, and each boy put his grimy hand into it, and gave the promise.

The truck made the four miles of homeward road in less than fifteen minutes. When the boys had all dispersed, Mr. Lancaster turned to Cis.

"Fine party, Miss Cis," he said. "Some day, after they've broken that promise, some of those lads will remember it again and that you were a good sport, yet loved God."

"They'll remember much more that the fine gentleman who could wrestle and jump was not a deserter," retorted Cis warmly. "I can't thank you for making my party so splendid, the ride back and everything, but you don't want my thanks! Will you come with me to supper at Nan's? She'll be

delighted if you will come. Or—where shall I hear about Miss Braithwaite?"

"When I come for you to-night. We are to spend the evening with Miss Lucas—Paul being understood!" replied Anselm Lancaster promptly. "Will you be ready at shortly after eight? We have important matters to settle; I'm an ambassador."

"From Miss Braithwaite?" cried Cis. "Oh, Mr. Lancaster, I want to see her! I miss it all so much!"

"Good to hear that!" He smiled at her. "I won't tell you my errand now, but you will walk slowly and let me present my credentials from the Lady Miriam to-night?"

"Oh, yes!" Cis laughed from sheer pleasure. "I've been getting homesick. Nan is as dear as ever, good, and sweet and dear, but she is so much married!"

Anselm Lancaster laughed. "She met me with a handsome baby on her hip; I thought she seemed to like him! But she assured me that you were almost as fond of him as she is; this was when I commented on his charms," he said.

"Like him! Well, yes, Nan does like him!" Cis laughed also. "And I am nearly as mad over him as she is, but—" Cis hesitated.

"But the finest baby is not a career for any other woman save his mother! Then to-night? It is good to see you again, Miss Cicely," Mr. Lancaster said.

That night Mr. Lancaster came to Nan's door a little before the appointed hour. "I seem to be arranging things to suit myself to-day," he an-

nounced to Cis when she appeared. "I called up Miss Lucas and said that I had to see you to-night on behalf of Miss Braithwaite, and that we would not spend the evening there. Instead, I have found a car like my own at the garage and have taken it for the evening. It is a beautiful night, soft little breeze, pleasant-tempered little moon! I'm going to drive you about and talk to you. Do you mind?"

"Not a bit!" Cis hoped that she did not betray how little she minded. "I must get a heavier wrap, though. Just a minute, and I'll be ready."

"Whither away?" asked Mr. Lancaster, when Cis was disposed on the seat beside him, a light-weight rug over her knees.

"Anywhere! I don't care where; I don't know many roads beyond here, though I was born and brought up here. I don't think it matters much which direction you take."

"We'll recklessly drive and turn corners, and after a while have to ask the way back! That sounds alluring. I always wanted to be lost!" cried Anselm Lancaster.

"Oh, did you? So did I!" cried Cis. "I used to try to lose myself when I was a little girl, but I have an Indian's sense of direction, and I always went right!"

"Great thing to have a true sense of direction, and go right when roads are obscure," said Anselm.

Cis did not answer; she heard a sub-meaning in his voice, and wondered if he were thinking of her bewilderment nearly two years ago.

"Now, about Miss Braithwaite," said Anselm,

getting away from her silence and her thoughts, which he divined, and from his own meaning which he knew that she had caught. "Miss Miriam's friend has died, after agony that must have directly opened heaven to her. Miss Miriam stayed by her to the end; it was not easy to see. But there's no use dwelling on that, beyond resolving to make her return home as cheerful as possible. You know what Miss Braithwaite is; she does not repine, and she has met this torture in the spirit that is hers. It's almost harder to see agony that can't be relieved, except by anaesthetics daily losing their efficacy, than it is to bear it. Miss Miriam is sixty-five years old, dear Miss Cis. That isn't old; we know how unfailing her strength is, her strength of character, of mind, of efficiency, but old age may be seen coming along at sixty-five, much as if she were standing on the corner waiting for a trolley transfer, and the other trolley which she was to take were bounding down its track toward her."

"I don't want Miss Braithwaite to be old! I can't bear to think of it. She's one of those persons who should never be old; so clever, so brilliant, so highly good!" protested Cis.

"And so vital," added Anselm. "I can't imagine her old. But it would be hard to deny her the reward of the qualities which make us want to hold her fast; I imagine that, while she willingly lives and works, she will be glad to lay down this life when she is permitted to. No one whose appraisals are as accurate as hers can value life in itself. However, that's beyond our authority. She is lonely,

dear Miss Cis, and she had grown fond of you, dependent on your youth, your sense of humor, your mind, which in all its workings responds to hers."

"Oh, me!" cried Cis. "Why, I'm only twenty-three, for one thing, and I'm not clever, nor travelled, nor well-read, so—"

"It isn't nice to set up tenpins for me to bowl over," Anselm teased her. "No one can safely drive and bowl at the same time. You know quite well that Miss Braithwaite was happy with you. You were a bright spot in her charming, but silent house. The proof of this is that she wants you back. She was going to write to you, but I'm her ambassador, as I told you this afternoon. She bids me beg of you to come back, back to stay, to make your home with her permanently, unless you find something else that calls to your true vocation as we both think you will. She bade me say that if it made you happier to resume your secretaryship, she was entirely willing, or for you to take up any other work, if you like to be occupied, feel independent. She says that this is not necessary; there would be no question of obligation to her, 'she needs you too badly'—that is what she said—but she will not oppose you. 'All that she asks is that she may see your bright head beside her hearth, know that you are coming home to her, as her daughter would come, at the close of every day.' That is literally her message, Miss Cicely. I do not think that you can find it in your heart to say her no."

Cis did not speak for a few minutes. Anselm went on silently guiding the smooth motion of the

car, guessing that she was as deeply moved as she actually was. At last Cis spoke, saying:

"You must know how this makes me feel, Mr. Lancaster. She has been so good to me; she is so wonderful, and now this! And I am alone. I don't suppose anybody, no matter how young and strong and jolly she may be, can help feeling alone when she is alone! It's strange that Miss Braithwaite wants me now. I have been growing restless, unsatisfied; I don't know what is wrong. I don't enjoy being here. I love the baby and Nan, but—I'm ashamed, but Miss Braithwaite, and Father Morley and you, and even the big things in Mr. Lucas' office, have all spoiled me for nice, steady, dull little days! I'm not better than Nan in brains; not nearly as good in the other sense, but, I've been fed on stronger food. Even her marriage—Joe is really a good boy; I do like him, but—Well, it isn't what you'd think it would be; what *I'd* think it would be, anyway! It's just like bread and butter three times a day, every day in the year!"

Anselm Lancaster laughed, but he shook his head.

"Don't you get to craving things too far beyond common human experience," he warned her. "The fact that it is called *common* experience means that it is the best lot for the majority. I'll warrant that to your Nan her husband is an oracle of wisdom, and a fount of charm! She's safe, too; remember that's no small asset in marriage. The sort of marriage that you describe goes peacefully into old age, undiminished in satisfaction, while hundreds are

shipwrecked around it which started out to a glorious fanfare of the trumpets of romance and unfounded idealization. However, I grant you that sort of life is not for you. You have outgrown your childhood comrades, the malnutritive food of little minds. You've been living at high speed for three years, Cicely Adair; you've left behind you the things of your childhood. Just how does all this apply to Miss Braithwaite's appeal to you to come to her? I'd say that it made it most opportune."

"It does, oh, it does!" cried Cis. "It takes my breath away. To go back feeling that I'm wanted, maybe needed; that I'm to go to make a home there; that all that beautiful, helpful life for others will be my life; that I'll read, think, learn, have Father Morley to guide me—Mr. Lancaster, I've spoken to you frankly, just as I always did. I've always felt that you would understand. You won't think I was criticizing dear little Nannie? I'd give my head to be as good as she is; dear little soul, always putting me up, and herself down! But—I want Beaconhite, and what I had there. Tell me truthfully, is it right for me to go? Ought I go?"

Anselm Lancaster let the car drop down to a low speed, and turned to look at Cis, with an expression on his face which, though she saw it clearly in the brilliant light of the interior of the car, she could not construe.

"Yes, Cicely," he said. "Truthfully I think that your place is there. I love Miss Miriam dearly; she is more to me than any of my kindred, more than any other friend. If it were only that you can be to

her, now that she needs sustaining, what you can be would seem to me enough reason for your going, you who are entirely free to go and do as you will. She has been a real power for good, an instrument which has helped to carve out the way for others to follow her into the Catholic Church, and one whose charity has bridged many a poor wretch back into a possible manner of living when hope seemed over for him. What can you ask better than to repay some of the debt God's children owe this woman? And you say that she has done much for you. I think that your place is in Beaconhite. If the decision rests with me, I say: Come! Thrice over: Come! And may all that lies ahead of you there, all that may come of it, be blessed and guided. How can I say aught else, save: Come?"

Cis looked up at him with a tiny smile, her under lip slightly drawn in, as a child who is half grieved, half glad smiles. She had many childish ways of face and hands; Anselm Lancaster and Miss Braithwaite found them her greatest charm.

"How beautiful to have what you want most to do also your duty!" she murmured.

"It always is when she who desires is innocent of wrong-doing, whose heart is God's first of all," said Anselm Lancaster, his words barely audible above the softly purring engine. "Don't you know, Cicely of the red-gold locks, that desire is one of the marks of a vocation? It was the Puritans who put into our heads the notion that it was praiseworthy to hate the thing one chooses. Love Beaconhite and Miss Braithwaite and choose them! Amen."

CHAPTER XXV

PORT

IT WAS settled that Cis was to return to Beaconhite. Mr. Lancaster had gone back, and immediately there came a brief, warm, characteristic letter from Miss Braithwaite to Cis.

"You are to come home on any terms you choose, my dear," she wrote, "as long as you come; there are no terms to my wanting you. If you will establish yourself in this house for good and all it will be transformed. My library is large, but not large enough to fill the vacancy in my life. Summer is coming, and I shall not be able to keep a fire on the hearth much of the time; can't you see how the library will need your hair in it? I need your radiance, my child; you are a most vivifying person, Cicely Adair! Other fires than that on my hearth are burning low; I grow chilled. Anselm tells me that you are coming, yet hesitate on the heels of the resolve lest you may not make good—isn't that the way to put it? Let me judge. You know how fully I speak my mind; I suppose no one ever is doubtful of my meanings! Then, when I say that coming to live with me will fulfil several of the corporal works of mercy—feeding the hungry, comforting the sorrowful, visiting the sick—of mind, at least—it is strictly true. I am impatiently waiting for

you; come as soon as you can, please. And be sure that I am not only lovingly, but gratefully, Your grumpy old friend, Miriam Braithwaite."

"You are glad to leave me, Cis—and baby!" Nan reproached her.

"You are so completely married, Nannie! And I can't claim my godson unless I do away with you and Joe," Cis replied. "With Jeanette living in Beaconhite I'll have one girl friend there. Father Morley will teach me what I ought to know; he's truly a great man. You know what Miss Braithwaite is; I've told you as much as can be told about her. Life in that house is never far off from the greatest, the eternal things, but it is also overflowing with beauty of books, music, art—and Miss Braithwaite does so love to play like a child, but a witty, wonderful child! It's a beautiful life; I can't help being glad to live it. But you know I love you, Nannie!"

Cis took her small friend in her arms to kiss her hard.

"There's no chance for Tom, Cis?" hinted Nan. "I thought, possibly, when you sent Rodney Moore away—I know you did send him!—that maybe—? Mother is so anxious for it; she's going to talk to you before you go."

"Oh, Nan, don't let her!" protested Cis. "That's awful; second-hand wooing! If a girl were beginning to think about a man I'd suppose that it would turn her off to have his mother come to offer him to her! Don't let your mother try that! And help me to dodge nice young Tommy! Because I'll

never in all this world marry the boy, so why bother about it?"

"Why, indeed," sighed Nan. "I'll try to head off my family. I think Tom is convinced that he stands no chance."

"He knows I'm truthful and sure of what I want," Cis said lightly. "Now I'm going to talk to Mr. Singer. We've everything running in fine shape down there; it won't be hard to fit someone into my shoes."

"I wish Miss Gallatin would take it," said Nan.

"I wish she could," Cis said thoughtfully. "But it ought to be someone younger, more ornamental. Girls forget that sort of woman made herself what she is by being the right sort of girl; they think they were always elderly and were born with serious, decorous clothes on, commonsense shoes, and carrying an umbrella to be ready for storms—a figurative umbrella against figurative storms, too! Miss Gallatin is going to stay on in the Lucas household when Jeanette leaves it. After all, she has a big field there; all those children and an invalid mother! I wish I could get a Catholic woman into the club of Bells—that's what I call it, but Mr. Singer won't let me use that nice name. Lots of the girls are the kind of Catholics I was, need the Catholic woman, and she wouldn't harm the others! Girls aren't a bad lot, but it's marvellous how crookedly they see and think! I'd like to furnish them all with folding pocket rules to measure up by!"

Nan laughed, then sighed. "You'd do for a

pocket rule for all of them, if you'd stay here," she said. "A girl like you can do wonders. I'm sorry, *sorry* you're going!"

"Let's hope I'll shine as a light to girls in Beaconhite; there are girls there, silly Nancy!" laughed Cis. "Nan, I think they named that city expressly for my coming to it! Hasn't it been a beacon on the height to me?"

"It's your post graduate college; it's made you grow up. Oh dear, Cis, I've grown up, too, in the same time, but you have grown away from me!"

"Fast friends forever!" Cis corrected her, and pretended to mop tears out of Nan's eyes with her handkerchief.

Yet when it came to the actual parting it was Cis, not Nan, who cried tempestuously. She realized that this was a farewell that was final, however true it might be that they were, as she had said herself, "fast friends forever." Complete divergence of paths and interest ends, not the will to friendship, but its actuality. At their age Nan, married and settled, Cis going on to meet life, would pass out of knowledge of their common beginning. She and Nan would contrive to meet occasionally, and, thus meeting, find it difficult to talk together after the first exchange of news items was over. Cis recognized this, and felt it sad, but she attributed her crying to little Matt.

"He will grow every day, and do something new and darling every day, and I shall not see him, and he won't know me when I do see him! If only babies wouldn't grow up and begin to go to school

so soon!" she sobbed, mumbling her godson's soft cheeks.

"Mercy!" cried Nan, shocked by the suggestion that her son would soon take his place in the ranks of those in the second age of man's career.

Miss Braithwaite's coupé was waiting at the Beaconhite station to take Cis home when she arrived. She jumped into it with a thrill of joy and received Miss Braithwaite's quiet, warm welcome shyly, yet with high delight. It seemed to her that at last "she belonged," as she told herself; that this was a true home-coming.

Miss Braithwaite looked tired; Cis saw it after they had reached the house and were settled down to tea-serving by Ellen in the splendid library. At Miss Braithwaite's age the effects of hard experience take the appearance of physical ills, and often their form; it was less that Miss Braithwaite looked as if she had borne grief since Cis had last seen her, than that she looked as if she had seriously overtaxed herself, her nervous strength.

"Oh, how good this is! How happy and how good!" Cis sighed dropping her hat on the chair nearest to her, leaning back in the low chair which she occupied and rumpling her heavy coils of hair into a looseness adjusted to the upholstery.

"I've been bad, Miss Braithwaite, restless, unsatisfied, not knowing what was wrong, but suspecting a whole lot of things! And the suspicion that it was this house and Beaconhite was right! I wanted to be here."

"We are going to talk later; now it is tea, then

rest, and this evening talk," declared Miss Braithwaite. "Anselm wanted to come here to-night, but I forbade it; cloister observance for us this first night! Jeanette Lucas is to marry Paul Randolph, and be near by. Are you glad?"

"Indeed I am, only—Well, of course she wants to marry Mr. Randolph," Cis hesitated.

"Nothing wrong with him; I'd find him a bit dull," declared Miss Braithwaite. "He's intelligent, has a nice mind; can't turn it into currency to pay his way. I like a talker, as you know. But he is truly fine, and that he is nobly good he has given proof. There won't be lacking those who will say that he recognized his opportunity; that marrying Jeanette Lucas was wise, and that his sacrifice of an income will be made up to him without much loss of time."

"How contemptible!" cried Cis. "As though there were need of looking beyond Jeanette herself for a reason for wanting to marry her! If Mr. Randolph had that sort of worldly prudence he need not have come into the Church at all! Why are human beings so mean?"

"Because they are human, my dear. People must belittle fine actions when they are small people; big deeds are most annoying to small minds; they take them as personal affronts," returned Miss Braithwaite placidly. "It really does not matter about the chatter of parrakeets. If you are so partizan of Paul Randolph why did you seem to hesitate just now in approving the marriage?"

"I always hoped Jeanette would marry Mr. Lan-

caster, you know," said Cis promptly. "But neither of them ever showed symptoms, so I don't suppose it's Mr. Randolph's fault."

"Not in the least!" Miss Braithwaite laughed. "I sometimes think it may be another girl's fault, though. I suspect Anselm of other wishes."

"How exciting!" cried Cis. "Aren't you going to tell me? He seems so splendid, so interested in affairs, it's hard to imagine him thinking of marrying."

Miss Braithwaite laughed again, but she held up her hands in horror.

"Now heaven forfend!" she cried. "Cis, are you transforming poor Anselm into the hero of the early Victorian novel? Solitary, superior, remote, a demi-god, with the human, half wishy-washy, artificial? Because it's distinctly unfair of you, if you are! He is thoroughly a human being, but he has made his humanity what God meant a man to be. To my mind he's forceful, strong and quick in feeling; a vital man. He's precisely the man to think of marriage, and not to think of it coolly, but to bring to it a great love, such as would honor any woman and make her happy."

Cis stirred uneasily; she could not have said why she felt uncomfortable, ill-at-ease.

"I don't think anything of him that you would not want me to think, Miss Braithwaite," she said. "I don't know him as you do, of course, but I admire him almost as much. If only you could have seen him with those boys! And Tom said in the station everybody stared at him."

"Boys? Station?" echoed Miss Braithwaite. "Tell me."

And Cis told her the story, to which she listened without comment.

The next day Cis spent happily picking up the dropped threads of her Beaconhite existence. She went to Mr. Lucas' office and received a welcome beyond her expectation.

"Ah, my dear!" Mr. Lucas cried. "Now I shall have you back as soon as I can open the way for you! You were a good secretary; I miss you. But you were also a good confessor of the Faith! Amazing, but it was you who first brought home to me unescapably what I'd been suspecting all along; that there really was something unaccountable on natural grounds in the Old Church. I'm going to be a Catholic at Pentecost, my dear Cicely!"

"Yes, I know; Jeanette told me. I'm so thankful! And I could cry when you say I was the one who set you on!" Cis exclaimed.

"Nothing to cry over! We don't cry Te Deums, and that's your theme," Mr. Lucas smiled at her. "When will you return to the office? As soon as I provide the space?"

"I think so, Mr. Lucas. Miss Braithwaite would rather I'd stay at home all the time, but I'm afraid that's a risk for a red-haired girl; they're not crickets on hearths! Miss Braithwaite promises me all that I can do, though. We'll see. May I have a few days in which to adjust?" Cis asked. "Now I'm going on to find Father Morley."

The Jesuit was at home; he received Cis with his

cordial, yet appraising look that took an inventory of her days since he had last seen her. He seemed satisfied with what he saw; his eyes softened and smiled approvingly. He recognized in Cicely's face a new expression of self-reliance, purpose; peace that was not incompatible with the eager, wistful, unsatisfied look which her face also wore.

"Ready for the next thing," he told himself, "and it's not far ahead of her."

But aloud he said: "I am glad, exceedingly glad that you have come back to us, Cicely. Miss Braithwaite is thankful; she is deeply attached to you. You wrote me of that remarkable sequel to your fidelity to God's law. Do you care to tell me more about it?"

"I want to tell you all about it, Father," Cis answered. "I might have married Rodney without wrong-doing, but—Father, I couldn't! Isn't that strange? I didn't want to. I'm not a fickle person, but I didn't want to. He told me that I had been right as to his still being married. He felt that there was no divorce when he knelt by his dying wife. It's all strange, isn't it?"

"That isn't," said Father Morley. "It is strange, that you were the one who saved that poor creature from suicide to die like a Christian, but it is not strange that her husband recognized the indissoluble link between them. You will find it always true that the supernatural law does no violence to the natural law, but, on the contrary, confirms it, while elevating it beyond nature. To my mind that is one of the proofs of the Church.

Heretics have gone contrary to natural laws in all sorts of ways. The Church repeatedly proves that the hand of the Creator is also the hand that founded her. She has sanctified, ennobled, supernaturalized, not contradicted man's natural instincts and desires. Well, well! You're not demanding her proofs! Why do I set poor little you up as an heretical tenpin to be bowled over? What is your next step, or do you not know it yet, Cicely Adair?"

"No, Father," replied Cis wistfully. "I don't know a step; not the next one, nor any beyond that. Do you think I might be a nun? A Sister of Charity would be more in my line; active, you know. Is that what I'm made for?"

Father Morley looked at her gravely, yet with a quizzical twinkle in his eye, as if he were enjoying with himself a pleasant secret.

"No, my child, I do not think that is your vocation," he said. "I think that you are meant to be a real helpmeet to a fine man; to do good in the world, bear witness to the value of Catholic Faith and standards, and train up your sons and daughters to carry on that noble inheritance, while they rise up and call you blessed. Perhaps one day to see your son raise his hands before the altar, holding in them the Host, and to kneel, thanking God with tears, that you upheld those hands for that miracle."

"Father!" cried Cicely, and was silent, tears on her cheeks. "If I might! I'd like that most of all," she murmured after an instant.

Anselm Lancaster came that evening to see Cis; he announced that his call was wholly for her. Cis saw him come into the library with amazement that his presence so changed it. There was about him a buoyant happiness; charm went out from him, and purposeful assertion, which was far from conceit, sat on his every movement.

"Miss Miriam, Cicely Adair has never seen my house. I was offended last year that you never showed it to her, as much as you drove about, but I hid my wrath. Now I'm out for revenge! I'm going to show it to her myself, and not invite you! Cicely, I'll be here at half past two to-morrow afternoon. Please be ready to drive with me, out to my house—it's a shame you've not been shown it! —and also wherever the fancy takes us to go. This selfish and unfriendly Miss Miriam shall sit here and languish, eating her heart out till we return!"

"Is it a matter so serious as a heart-consuming?" asked Miss Braithwaite.

She caught and returned the flash of a look which Anselm darted at her.

"I'll not pretend a virtue I lack; I hope so!" he said.

Cis was ready when he came for her; he helped her into his car, and she cried out, almost reproachfully:

"A new car! Why are men always changing cars? What did you do with that nice one, the roadster?"

"Turned it in; I don't need two. I thought when Paul and Jeanette were married, and you were

here, we'd need the five passenger; we can take Miss Braithwaite, too. But please don't speak of *that* nice one; as if it weren't *this* nice one! Let me tell you I'm proud of this car!" Anselm said as he shoved out the brake and started.

"Of course you are! They always are! Boys of new knives; men of new cars! They are much alike, aren't they?" said Cis.

"Knives and cars? Oh, I don't know; I could always distinguish the differences," Anselm remarked.

"Boys and men! I never thought you would be stupid!" Cis said severely.

"I'll prove to you I'm not, if you'll wait a bit!" Anselm's remark sounded like a continuation of the nonsense they were happily talking, but his look silenced Cis, and set her nervously wondering why it made her nervous.

The Lancaster house was far finer than Cis had expected to find it. She had known all along that Anselm Lancaster had wealth; he used it generously, and it must have been considerable for him to accomplish with it all that he did. But ocular proof is another thing from hearsay. Here was a house of great dignity, standing in the midst of considerable land, approached by an avenue of old trees. Its solid doors, opening, revealed a stately hall; in the rooms opening from the hall Cis found old furniture, beautiful and stately. Pictures which even her untrained eye instantly knew for good ones, hung on the walls; bronzes, a tall clock, all sorts of beauty which was evidently the slow accu-

mulation by many people with taste and means to gratify it, filled the house.

"How beautiful!" cried Cis. "Why, Mr. Lancaster, it's what the novels call a mansion! It's as fine as Miss Braithwaite's house!"

"They are contemporaries. Her great-grandfather and mine, and each generation since, have been friends. This house was built when hers was. My people were not Catholics, till my grandmother married a Lancaster and brought this house to him; she became a Catholic after she had married him. My father married a saintly woman; it is two generations—I the third—since the Lancaster house became a Catholic home. Now I try to make it a home for converts who are put to too hard a test at first; a temporary home, of course. I'm more than glad that you like my house, Cicely!"

Anselm spoke in a curious muffled voice, and Cis smiled up at him, disturbed, at a loss to account for it, and for the disturbance which she recognized in him. "How could I not like it?" she said.

"Will you come to see my dear mother's sitting room?" Anselm asked, going toward the stairs. "It is up one flight. It is like a chapel to me; I've often wanted to make it into one, but there are necessary sleeping rooms over it; I can't use it for a chapel. It is the room in which I was happiest as a child, though I was always happy. It is the room where I learned to love books and all beauty, and where my soul was born through the soul of that lovely creature who gave me physical life."

Cis followed him, wondering, deeply moved. This was not the Anselm Lancaster she knew, yet it was not the contradiction of him; rather it was his efflorescence. He led her into a small, light room, facing toward the sunset, which was not yet, nor for hours, due. Evidently the room had not been changed since it had been used by the mother whom he had so dearly loved. Books, a work-basket, were on the table; a low armchair, considerably worn, stood beside the table. Anselm gently put Cis into it, and stood before her.

"My mother's chair, dear Cicely," he said. "I like to see you there. How you would have loved each other! Cis, dear, lovely, glowing Cicely, don't you know what I've brought you here to tell you? Don't you know? Haven't you guessed?"

Slowly Cis shook her head, looking at him intently, as if she were groping her way, her mind rejecting the one explanation of his words that it could present to her.

"Why, I love you, Cis! That's what it is. That's easy to guess, easier to understand!" cried Anselm.

"No, no, no! It's impossible to understand!" cried Cis.

"You're going to marry me, dearest; you're going to be here in my mother's place, always. Can't you love me? I love you so much!" Anselm pleaded.

"I never once thought of it; never once!" Cis cried.

"You don't have to think of it; just do it!" Anselm said boyishly.

"I think you are the best, the finest—" began

Cis, but he interrupted her with an impatient exclamation.

"Good heavens, Cis, stop! That's nothing to tell me, nor to feel! Love me; don't admire me!"

"Isn't it? I think I couldn't love anyone I didn't admire," said Cis, trying to find her puzzled way. "I loved someone; you know that. I was crazy to see him; it made my breath short when he came; I—One doesn't love again, does she? But I know now that I couldn't love him last winter because I didn't admire him."

"Cis, dear," began Anselm, sitting on the edge of the table as if he meant to argue it out, "I think we don't love again in that same first way; it's the dream of youth. I had it, too, but I was only a lad of seventeen when I fell madly in love. You were older than I when it happened to you but you were not much older, and you were no more experienced, and experience is what counts in these things. There is a glamor over everything that is part of that time of life, and we have our first love hard. But, dear, it's not in the same class with our later, mature love. Do you imagine I felt for that little fluffy girl of twenty whom I loved when I was seventeen, anything like what I feel for you? Nor was that first love of yours, which you so bravely conquered for God's sake, the love you'll feel for your husband, who will be one with you in all things of soul and body. Cis, honestly—though it may sound conceited—I am sure you love me. Will you be sure of it? Father Morley, Miss Braithwaite, Jeanette, hope for it."

"Oh! Do they all know?" gasped Cis.

"That I love you? Surely. Blind little Cis not to have known it yourself! But now that you do know it—"

"I couldn't so much as think of marrying you!" Cis hastily interrupted him. "Why, I'd be—what would I be? One of the people brought into a country to serve it, then deserting its flag—a traitor! That's it! Miss Braithwaite imported me to live with her, be almost a daughter to her. Much good I'd do her if I—"

"Now, Cicely, can't you trust Miss Miriam to me?" Anselm interrupted in his turn. "Do you suppose we haven't discussed my hopes? Haven't I just told you that she wanted them fulfilled? Good mothers do not want to mortgage their daughters' lives; they want them to find their own places and happily fill them. Miss Braithwaite shall not lose you if I win you, dear one! She is most anxious for this marriage, Cis. 'Cis must come to me, Anselm; then you shall woo her at your best. She shall be in her home, the home that holds you part of it, and I hope that will incline her to harken to you. But if not, then at least she is still in her own home; the dear child will be made secure however she decides.' That is what she said to me, Cicely beloved, before I went away to try to bring you back. Marry me, then there will be another besides ourselves happy; Miss Miriam the third rejoicing."

"I don't see how you can possibly mean that you want to marry me!" said Cis slowly abandoning

Miss Braithwaite's cause. "Don't you think you mean someone else?"

"I distinctly think that I mean no one else!" cried Anselm. "Do I strike you as positively feeble-minded? There's no difficulty in telling you from all others. I can tell you apart literally, quite apart from all others created! And I'm not grave and settled down; I'm only thirty-eight, darling! Are you thinking of me as solemn, serious, almost elderly? No, no; I'm not! I'm your lover, Cis, and he loves you more than he can tell you. Will you come here, Cis, desire of my heart? Will you help me in the beautiful schemes we've discussed? Take my mother's place, but fill only your own place, my wife's place, my helpmeet's place—and more; a thousand times more!"

"You are meant to be a real helpmeet to a fine man." Cis heard Father Morley's voice again saying these words to her. He had known when he said it that Anselm meant to ask her to marry him; he wanted her to marry Anselm, though Anselm was a great man, while she was only red-haired Cicely Adair!

It came upon her with an irresistible rush of conviction that she did love Anselm, that she had been loving him and had not known it. For how could she ever have thought of his loving her? Yet this was why all other things, Nan, her old home, Rodney Moore seemed insufficient to her; this was why she had been restless, longing, unsatisfied. What a life it was that opened out before

her in this house, the wife of this man, his help-meet, his beloved!

Distrust of herself, the magnitude of the joy stretching out before her drove her into the true woman's dalliance with yielding to this unforeseen bliss.

She must hold off for a little while the glorious submergence of herself out of which she knew would arise the truer, greater self which would forevermore be Cicely.

"Take me home," Cis said rising. "I cannot answer yet."

Obediently Anselm followed her toward the door, but he looked bitterly disappointed. Cis halted, wavering, on the threshold, as her heart smote her for this look. This was Anselm's mother's room, the sanctuary of his childhood, the shrine of a tender love. It would be sweet to make him happy here; he had brought her hither for this.

She was a generous Cicely, albeit a frightened one. She turned fully and faced Anselm.

"I think I do. Love you, I mean. I'll come," she said.

He caught her, reverently, gratefully, yet most lovingly in his arms and kissed her flaming hair, her white brow, her closed eyes, and at last, with the bridegroom's kiss, he kissed her sweet lips.

The great cable which had held her fast, had also drawn Cis safe into port.

THE END

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